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August 9

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Was She a Wife?

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"What do you know about my husband?" "Inez, Inez, I'm married to him, too!"

Was She a Wife?

One man's treachery stole from her her girlhood's hopes and dreams, her right to real love . . .

By Amita Fairgrieve

"WHAT'S the matter, hon?" Chester Clough asked his young bride. "Sad? Tired?"

Inez turned, trying to smile. "No, but I've been thinking all day of that little pal of mine who came here five whole years ago. I promised her aunt to find her if I could. While I was working I hadn't time, but now it seems as if I might try."

"Pretty hard, in a place the size of New York," said Chester, rather unfeelingly. "Especially if she doesn't want to be found."

"If I could only be sure she's all right," said Inez, and the troubled look came back to her sweet face. "She

was so little and so dear, Chet! Eyes the color of bluebells under water, and hair like burned butterscotch—"

"Oh, come!" cried Chester, with a shout of laughter. "Bluebell eyes are bad enough, but butterscotch hair—and burned at that!"

"I don't care," she said firmly. "That's just what it looked like."

"How long is it since you've heard from her?"

"More than four years."

"And what was her name?"

"Annie Barnes . . . Why, what's the matter?"

For her husband had risen to his feet with an exclamation.

He turned aside. "Nothing," he said, shaking his hand. "I burned my fingers on a match, that's all. Downes, you said her name was?"

"*Barnes.*"

"I'm afraid there's not much use looking for her," he said again. "It isn't as if we could hire a detective, or as if you'd be sure you'd want to know her if you did find her."

"That's a horrid thing to say," Inez told him. "No matter what has happened to Annie, she's my buddy, my pal."

Chester often hurt her when he said things like that, things suggestive of evil. She supposed it was because he was a man that his mind worked that way. She hadn't known any man very well until she married him, and she often had to change a subject because he had turned it into something distasteful. Inez was nineteen, and she had been married four months. Already she had begun to wonder. . .

Chester was getting into his coat. To-night was his night at lodge, but he seldom went out without her. He came to her with his hat on his head, and as he bent for his good-by kiss she threw her arms around him almost fiercely. "Oh, Chet!" she exclaimed, "it *is* going to be all right, isn't it? We *are* suited to each other?"

"Good Lord, of course we are," he answered, patting her cheek with his glove. "What's the matter now?"

"You love me better than anybody else in the world? You never even thought you loved another girl?"

"Certainly not. What's eating you to-night?"

"I'm so frightened sometimes," she confessed. "We don't know each other very well. We never *talk*. Just go to the movies. And I'm alone so much—"

"Well, who could understand a woman!" he wondered. "I thought you wanted to keep house. And how can I keep you company when I have our living to earn? Do you want me to stay home with you?"

"No—oh, Chester, no. I'm just silly, I guess." She kissed him lingeringly, then moved toward the door with him. "There, run along and have a good time."

"Going to sit up for me?"

"Yes."

"I'll bring home a box of ice cream."

She watched him down the stair, then ran to the window to wave at him when he appeared in the street below. She leaned out over the geraniums on the sill and called, "Burnt almond and vanilla mixed! Be sure!" But just then a train roared by on the "L," half a block away, and though he smiled up at her and waved his hand she knew he had not heard.

She stood there motionless until he was out of sight, and again a queer little feeling of premonition clutched her heart.

She did not understand it. How

could it occur to her that she was never to see him again?

SHE drew back at last, pulled down the sash, for the night was growing chill, and turned to her dinner dishes. They were pretty dishes (English porcelain made in Utica, N. Y.), with bluebirds on the borders; the tea towels on the rack were pretty, too, with pictures on them instead of the usual blue or pink checks. She tidied up the room—they had only two—quickly but thoroughly, and then sat down with a book. There was sewing to do, of course, a button off of Chester's Sunday coat, a rent in the sleeve of a shirt, but only reading could distract her mind to-night. She was beginning to be interested in the adventures of her heroine when there came a knock at the door.

Oh, goody, company! Maybe some of the girls; they knew it was Chet's "night out."

She sprang up, ran to the mirror and fluffed out her hair, powdered her nose, smoothed her dress down over her hips. The knock came again, timidly, and she went to the door and opened it.

A slight girl in a shabby suit stood there. She was turned partly away, and the light from the hall lamp, left burning because the landlady paid for it, fell on a cluster of curls which showed at the back of her neck under a little hat. They were curls the color of butterscotch—"burned" butterscotch.

She wheeled around. "I'm looking for Mrs. Clough," she faltered. "Mrs. Chester Clough—"

And then she stopped, her lips apart, her eyes staring. They were bluebell eyes, and "under water" now in truth, drowned in tears.

"Annie!" Inez cried gladly, and she seized her friend and dragged her into the room. "Oh, you little darling! You've been in my mind all day. Isn't this *wonderful?* How did you find me?"

She was almost crying, too, and she led the smaller girl, unresisting, to her biggest chair, pushed her down into it, pulled off her hat, began to unbutton her coat. "You little darling!" she said again, and sitting on the arm of the chair, took her friend's hands in hers. Even in her excitement she noticed how rough they felt, and how cold. "Don't cry, Annie," she said. "It's all right now—we've found each other again."

Annie spoke, and she seemed dazed. "I was looking for Mrs. Chester Clough," she said.

"That's my name now," Inez answered cheerfully. "Who told you how to find me?"

Slowly a look of horror came into Annie's face. "Oh, Inez, it isn't *you?*" she breathed.

"Yes, dear, who else should it be?"

"Are you the girl that Chester married?" She shrank down into the chair and put the small rough hands before her eyes.

And suddenly it dawned on Inez that Annie had not been seeking *her* at all, but Chester's wife. She took her friend by the shoulders. "Look up here," she commanded. "Tell me what's the matter. Annie, Annie dear, don't be afraid. I'm Inez, who loves you. Tell me why you came. *What is it that you know about Chester?*"

Annie did look up then. "I ought to be brave and go away," she said. "I ought not to tell you. But I'm so tired. Inez—Inez—I'm married to him, too!"

And then, as Inez stared at her, she thrust her hand down inside her blouse

and drew out a ribbon on which was strung a ring. She held it up so that her friend could see the inscription: *Chester to Annie, 1923.*

"I've got so thin I can't wear it any more," she said pitifully.

THE turmoil in Inez's mind was beyond description, and her throat felt as if it would burst. Grasping it with one hand, she rose and backed away, until the wall stopped her. Twice she tried to speak without success; then the words broke through; her voice sounded hoarse and strange in her own ears.

"Annie? *My* husband? You are sure it's the same?"

"I followed him to this house last night," said Annie. "He left me six months ago, and I've been almost crazy, looking for him, searching the hospitals, the morgue, even the jails. Then last night I happened to see him in the down town crowd, and I came up here after him. I couldn't get near enough in the subway to speak, and when we came upstairs he walked so fast I was out of breath. I saw him come in here, and I waited a little and rang the bell and asked the woman if Chester Clough lived here. Of course, I wasn't sure that he'd be using the same name, but he was, and she said he was married. I went away then, to try to think what to do. I lay awake all night, trying to think what to do. And then I thought I'd come and see his wife—see her—you—"

"But I'm not his wife," Inez whispered, "if he was married first to you."

Then she went toward her friend again and sat in the chair beside her. "You poor little thing!" she said. "Oh, how could he? How *could* he? Annie, you were married four years?"

"Yes."

"Have—have you any children?"

"I had one," said Annie. "It died." After a pause, she added stonily, "Thank God, it died."

"Oh, hush, my darling. Don't talk so. *You're* all right, dear, don't you see? I'm the one—" Suddenly she broke off. "How could he do it to us? Oh, Annie, what are men made of? And only this evening he said to me, 'Who could understand a woman?' A *woman!* Annie, tell me, do you love him yet?"

The small figure nodded mournfully. "I guess so. I don't know. I'm so used to loving him—" Her voice trailed into silence.

"Well, I'm not!" cried Inez in a fierce, unnatural tone. "If he's done this, he's not the man I thought him. He's not the man I imagined I loved at all!"

"I know," said Annie. "I found that out long ago. But I kept on loving him because he was all I had."

"Oh, Annie, dear, you could have had me—you could have had all the folks at home who love you. Aunt Molly has been so worried. Why didn't you write us in all this time?"

"He wanted our marriage to be secret," Annie explained. "He said some money was coming to him if he stayed single. And I couldn't write without telling about him, so I put it off from day to day, and finally it ended in my not writing at all." She looked up timidly. "Inez? You don't hate me?"

"Hate you? No. You couldn't help it, you poor little thing. I'm only trying to think what is best to do."

"You won't put him in prison?" Annie ventured.

"We could of course, couldn't we? But how would that help matters? It wouldn't be worth all the publicity—

our pictures in the papers—the trial, everything. I couldn't stand it, Annie, and neither could you. I think I'll go away."

"Take me with you!"

"No, no, Annie. Let me think." Inez pressed her hands across her temples, which had begun to throb. The first shock was over; she was beginning to realize the horror of her position. Presently she got up and moved about the room restlessly. What was there to do? "Annie," she said at last, "will you help me to get away?"

"Help you to pack, you mean? Of course."

SHE followed into the bedroom and began to empty the dresser drawers while Inez took down her clothes from the closet hangers. She got out her steamer trunk and a big suitcase, and piled her dresses in somehow, anyhow.

"Here, let me do it!" cried Annie, suddenly taking charge. "You'll ruin them that way!"

"What does it matter?" said Inez with bitterness. But she sat back on her heels and watched Annie as she neatly sorted and folded the clothes and laid them in the trunk; she always had been a methodical little thing.

"Darlin'," said Inez, "tell me what you've been doing since he left you. How do you get along?"

"Housework," was the cheerful answer. "By the day."

"You used to be one woman's maid, didn't you? Wasn't it easier?"

"Yes, but you don't get so much money," said Annie shrewdly. "And you don't have so much time to yourself. I make four dollars and ten cents a day—and walk to save the ten cents."

"You poor baby!" exclaimed Inez.

Annie turned on her. "What are you going to do yourself—now?"

"Go back to an office, if I can get a job."

"But now—to-night?"

Inez shook her head. What, indeed, could she do? If she returned to her old landlady, Chester would find her immediately, yet who else would take her in so late? In any case, she must not tell the other girl her plans. If Annie would stay here to confront Chester as she, Inez, wished her to do, it would be better for her not to know where her friend had gone. She might involuntarily betray the knowledge to him.

"I'll be all right, Annie," she said. "I'll call you to-morrow and tell you what I've decided to do."

"You want me to stay here—to—face him?" faltered Annie.

"Yes. You're his wife. You have the right to be here—these things are really yours. I paid for some of them, but they're no good to me now." The trunk was full by this time, and she knelt on the lid to press it down and lock it. Annie bent over to help her, and suddenly they were in each other's arms again, half sobbing.

"Oh, Inez!" Annie cried, "I can't bear to see you go like this! Don't let me drive you away! Stay, and we'll talk to him together—"

"No," said Inez, and her mouth set in a hard line. "I never want to see him again. I hope I never shall. What he's done to you is bad enough, but, darling, think, *think* what he's done to me. I don't dare trust myself to see him again. I don't know what I'd say or do—"

"I'm afraid to stay alone," said Annie. "What shall I say to him? How can I explain?"

"He's the one to do the explain-

ing," answered Inez, and her usually gentle voice was grim; her lovely eyes burned.

"Won't you even write him a note?"

"No!" Then she hesitated, changed her mind. "Yes, I will." She opened her desk and on the calendar that stood there, wrote:

CHESTER:

I don't know whether I ever can forgive you. I hope we never meet again. But if you're not good to Annie now, I'll have you punished for what you did to both of us.

INEZ—LATHROP.

The signing of her maiden name seemed to bring home to her the truth of her situation more than anything else had done. And yet a numbness had come over her. She felt as if she were acting in a play. She picked up her suitcase and started for the door.

"Good-by, dear, don't be afraid," she said. "I'll get a taxi and send up for the trunk. *Don't be afraid.* Remember, you're in the right. *You're* not the one to be afraid." She kissed the little face tenderly, smoothed the butterscotch curls with hands that trembled. Still that feeling of unreality possessed her; she herself was sitting somewhere looking on while her body went through certain motions, spoke certain lines. That queer, detached part of herself even regretted that she could not be present at the dramatic meeting between Chester and the wife he had deserted. She even wondered, hysterically, whether they would eat the ice cream!

She got her taxi, had her trunk taken to Grand Central and checked there, and then she walked toward her old landlady's after all. It was the only home she knew; she could stay the night there and leave early in the morning before he could find her.

Mrs. Raymond took her in without comment. It was not the first time a girl had left her house to be married and come back within a few months or years, with that look in her eyes she saw in Inez's now.

"Your own room is vacant, dearie," she said. "Would you rather have that, or the little front one?"

"My own, I guess," said Inez. "And —Mrs. Raymond—if Che—if anybody comes or calls up, will you say you haven't seen me?"

"Of course, I will," the woman answered promptly. She lingered in the doorway, curious, yet too inherently kind to ply the girl with questions. "If there's anything you want, dearie—?"

"No—no. I'll be all right," said Inez, her voice breaking on the last word.

Mrs. Raymond withdrew and shut the door. Inez, still in that lethargy, took off her hat and coat, her shoes, started to undress. Then she turned and threw herself on the small bed in which she had slept for the last time the night before her wedding day.

Misery, like a wave, closed over her.

SHE must *do* something. The first sleepless night taught her that.

To begin with, there was very little in her purse. Mrs. Raymond would wait for the rent, she knew, but she could not ask favors indefinitely. And even more pressing than the need for money was the need for something to employ her mind. If she could get a job again, a job that would tire her out mentally and physically every day, perhaps this dreadful chaos in her brain would calm. She dressed carefully, and, although she had little interest in her appearance, she took pains with her

make-up, too. She could not efface the shadows under her eyes, but she could draw attention from them by the color on her mouth and cheeks. Mrs. Raymond brought her up a tray of breakfast and lingered, half through compassion, half through curiosity.

"Can't you eat, dearie?" she asked anxiously. "Just orange juice and coffee won't stand by you very long."

The girl raised her head suddenly, and in her eyes was the look of a stricken animal. "Oh, Mrs. Raymond, what are men made of?" she cried.

"We'll be married—soon—and begin to live." "No, Barry, no! I'm afraid!"

"Haven't any of them any realization of honor?"

"Not when dealing with women."

And then the story came, and with it the relieving tears. "He's told me a hundred times," sobbed Inez, "that

I'm the One and Only. And all the time he was married. And married to Annie, of all people. If I didn't know her so well, I might think she'd cheated, or been nasty to him, and given him some excuse. But little, sweet, dependent Annie! He began going with me months before he left her, even. How could he do it? How could any man, even if he didn't care about us, do such a thing for his own sake? You'd think his self-respect would stand in the way."

Mrs. Raymond snorted. "Self-respect!" she answered. "Dearie, men don't know how to spell the word. They ain't worth blowin' to hell any more!"

And then the bell rang downstairs, and she got up to go. "If that's him," she said darkly, "I'll tell him to go out before I call a cop!"

BUT Inez, listening over the banisters, heard a strange voice in the hall below and was reassured.

She went to the mirror and repaired, as well as she could, the ravages of her weeping. The merciful numbness was coming back; she felt that she might be able to go back to her old office, after all, and parry the questions that she would be asked. But not just yet. Not until she'd had a walk in the sunshine, and felt the breeze from the Hudson on her face.

She took a bus up Riverside, got off near Grant's Tomb, and went and stood for a while looking at the grave of the "amiable child." They lay here just alike, the little unknown boy and the great general. It all came to the same thing in the end. Love and hate and pain, wrong doing and right doing, crumbled into dust.

She tore herself away at last, and began to walk slowly down along the park. After a while she sat down on a bench to rest. A boy who was sitting there with a collection of bundles got up and went off, whistling, presently, and after he had gone she noticed that he had left one of the packages behind him. She picked it up and started to her feet to follow him, but he was not in sight. Then she examined the package. It was a large manila envelope, bulky with papers, unaddressed, but with a return card in the upper corner:

BARRON SCHUYLER AND SON
Printers and Bookbinders
Where Nineteenth Street Crosses
Tenth Avenue New York, N. Y.

She decided to walk over to Broadway to find a public telephone, but on the way she changed her mind. She would deliver the package herself; it would be something to do.

She went down town on the Ninth Avenue "L," and found the address, a big old warehouse building with a door that looked like a freight entrance. She was carried up to the twelfth floor in a huge elevator, shaky with antiquity, but the lobby where she landed was both attractive and artistic. The walls were paneled in walnut; leather settees ran along the sides, and the receptionist sat at a desk near a casement window with tiny diamond-shaped panes.

Inez approached and explained her errand.

"Gee!" said the girl. "If the old man hears that, he'll fire the kid, and no questions asked. You'd better see Mr. Schuyler, junior."

Inez hesitated.

"Couldn't you get it back to him yourself?"

"He'll want to thank you for the

trouble you've taken. Here, Henry," she called to the office boy who hovered near, "take this lady in to see Mr. Schuyler, junior."

So Inez was led along a corridor lined with small offices to an open door at the end.

SHE was never to forget her first impression of "Mr. Schuyler, junior." He was so *alive*. He was telephoning, and his profile was toward her, a strong, dark profile, almost a harsh one. He was tanned, she saw, by a hotter sun than shines above New York, but what struck her most was the erect, alert way he held himself, the vitality that radiated from every line of him. He sat his chair as he might have sat a horse.

Then he put down the receiver and turned to her, and all idea of sternness was banished by the beauty of his eyes. They were very dark and bright, "foreign-looking" eyes, she thought, as he got to his feet and stood waiting. She told her story again, and he pulled forward a chair for her, then took the package and, with a word of apology, tore it open.

"We'd have been in a jam for sure if we'd lost this," he said. "The author's in South Africa and I don't suppose the publishers have another copy in this country. Just the sort of manuscript an accident *would* happen to, of course. I can't tell you how we appreciate this, Miss—?"

"Lathrop."

"It's been awfully good of you, Miss Lathrop. I wish we could repay you in some way."

"Don't fire the boy," she said impulsively.

He grinned at her. "I'll have to bawl him out, of course, scare the life out of him. After that, he'll probably be a better messenger than a new boy would be. And you'll consider that a sufficient reward?"

She nodded and rose reluctantly, and he went to the door and offered his hand, as if he, too, was reluctant to see her go. And without meaning to, she said:

"Mr. Schuyler, there *is* something—"

"Yes?" he asked encouragingly.

"I had no such thought when I came here, but I'm a stenographer out of work. If you could help me get something perhaps—"

"Come back and sit down again." Then, as she obeyed, "Tell me what experience you've had."

"I've worked two years for Halsey's, the publishers."

"Yes. I know them, of course. When did you leave?"

"Four months ago." She hesitated, then went on bravely, "They'll tell you that I left to be married. It—it didn't work."

"I'm sorry to hear that," he said gently. "So now you're looking for a job again?"

"Yes, I've just started to."

"Have you been over there?"

"Not yet. I think they'd take me back if there's room, and I know Mr. Halsey would give me a reference."

"Maybe I'll call him up later. But you're your own reference. Suppose you take a letter for me and let's see how it goes."

Inez drew off her gloves, ashamed to find that she was trembling. Mr. Schuyler did not seem to notice, however. He gave her a notebook and sat looking through a pile of mail. After a little he began to dictate slowly, increasing his speed gradually as she gained confidence and calmness. Then he opened the typewriter desk that

stood near his, and left her alone by herself.

It was a quarter of an hour before he returned; she could have typed the letter several times. As he read it over she watched him anxiously, but his face showed that he was pleased before he spoke.

"You don't seem to have forgotten your training, Miss Lathrop, and we happen to need a good secretary temporarily. Mine has been badly hurt in an automobile wreck, and may be laid up three months. Most of our girls here are only typists, and, as a matter of fact, we have notified the agencies to send us some one. I'll cancel the notice at once." As he sat down to telephone, he added: "We pay her forty-five. Will that do?"

"Mr. Schuyler, I never made that much."

"You'll earn it," he assured her grimly. "It includes two or three nights a week overtime. Can you take off your hat and stay now?"

This quickness of decision, this certainty of knowing what he wanted, were characteristic of him, she was to learn, but their first demonstration almost took away her breath. However, she hung up her hat and coat, powdered her nose, and was ready when he swung toward her on his chair, with the letters in his hands.

Already last night seemed a world away.

INEZ found that he had not been speaking idly when he said that she would earn her salary; she had never worked harder in her life. But she was glad of it; it gave her no time to brood on her situation. "Mr. Schuyler, junior," was a reasonable and appreciative chief. In this he did not at all resemble his father, who was far from either. "The old man's" rages were the source of constant turmoil throughout the office, and Inez many times reflected that the son might have accomplished miracles if he had not so often to act as buffer between the irate head of the business and his disgruntled employees. He accomplished a great deal as it was.

Evenings, as he had warned her, he often asked her to work overtime, and in the more informal hours spent thus together they began to get acquainted. One rainy night he offered to drive her home.

"Are your family in town?" he asked.

"I haven't any. My father and mother were killed when I was a baby, and grandmother died just before I came to New York. I live in a furnished room."

"It must be tough for a girl to be alone," he said.

"It's lonely sometimes, but I didn't mean to make a bid for sympathy. I have some wonderful friends, people who like the same things and are always ready to go the same places."

"That's the test of friendship, isn't it? Where would you like to go tonight?"

She dimpled at him. "Home, please, and nowhere else but. I have to report 'where Nineteenth Street crosses Tenth Avenue' at 9 A.M., and it's almost ten now."

"Did you eat a respectable dinner?"

"Fair. And *you* didn't have any."

"I'd rather work right through," he said. "Come and have some with me now!"

"I have to report—" she began again.

"No, you don't! I'll give you the morning off. Come and watch me eat mine, anyway."

She hesitated. It was part of her code not to accept invitations from a "boss." But Barry Schuyler was different, and what good reason had she to refuse?

So they went to a big restaurant, where they had a "pew," as Barry called it, to themselves, and she shared his first course and dessert. He lingered over the meal, telling her of the vacation he'd had just before she came, of the week-ends which he spent riding or swimming on Long Island. No wonder he looked so fit and hard, she thought.

And she told him of her unexciting childhood in a country town; of her best friend, Annie, "so little and innocent you always felt you had to protect her," and of Annie's Aunt Molly, who had always been so good to both of them, and who was the only link left now with the past. She told him the details of her present life, too, little thinking how meager, even pathetic, they seemed to the man whose own life was so rich and full. But she did not bring up the subject of her marriage, the one great experience she had so far lived through, and he did not ask her, although they were both thinking of it.

After a while he told her of the mother who had died the year before.

"Sometimes, even yet," he said in a low voice, "I think I can never get over it. She was shopping one day, and gone the next. I couldn't believe it at first, and I guess that's how you bear things — not really realizing them."

"But you'd *had* her," she said gently.

"Yes," he answered, with a smile in the depths of his dark eyes, "for twenty-seven perfect years."

And the girl who had never known her mother, the girl who did not envy him his riches nor his opportunities, envied him his memories.

THAT night she lay awake for a long time, thinking over the talk of the evening, thinking especially of that part of her life which she had not mentioned. She reflected, a little bitterly, that she need not have worried about Chester's following her; he evidently had no desire to learn what had become of her. She had telephoned to Annie the first day, as she had promised, to say that she was "all right," and Annie's little frightened voice had come over the wire to her, saying that she, too, was "all right."

"Is some one there, Annie?" . . . "Yes," . . . "Then you can't speak plainly to me?" . . . "No." . . . "But he behaved himself? You're going to stay together?" . . . "Yes—oh, yes." . . . "I'm glad for you, darling. Good-by."

And that was all.

She had not telephoned again; she could not seek her friend out; the situation would have been impossible. She had stayed on in her old room fearfully at first, but a feeling of security had grown as the weeks passed. Anger still surged over her at times when she thought of the man who had been her husband; she felt that she would carry the stigma of that experience to her grave. But she did not regret him. It was true, as she had said the first night, that she wanted never to see him again. He was an unspeakable cad; he had dishonored her and wronged Annie; but if he made it up to Annie in future she would never interfere. She did not regret him *because she had never loved him.* She knew that, now. It had been infatuation, loneliness, what you will, but not love. If she had loved him her heart would be breaking now.

A happy accident had brought her interesting and strenuous employment immediately, and she had begun to go out with her old friends again. Nothing was changed; she would go back and be the same as she had been before.

Yet the necessity for concealment wore upon her. Since her first outburst to Mrs. Raymond she had confided in no one. Let the girls think what they pleased. Some of them had never liked Chester, and told her so frankly now.

"But I never thought you'd find him out so soon," one said. "What did he do to open your eyes?"

Inez evaded the direct question. "I made a mistake, that's all," she answered. "And I was punished for it, just as if I'd known better. Let's call up and see if we can find out where Norma Shearer is playing to-night."

So they went to see Norma, and the friends that mattered accepted the fact that the marriage had not "worked," and forbore to question her; the others talked and speculated behind her back, and remained in darkness.

After that one evening Barry Schuyler had not paid her any particular attention. He was all that could be desired in a boss, but he seemed to have ceased to regard her as a friend or as a woman. Yet they were perfectly in tune, and others felt it beside themselves.

One noon Inez did not go out, but lay down on a couch in the rest room and tried to sleep. Some of the girls were talking on the other side of the partition, and suddenly she heard her own name mentioned.

"Miss Chapin's about due back, isn't she?" one asked.

And another answered, "It's time. There'll be some hair pulling when she finds that little Lathrop has been poaching on her preserves."

"She *is* pretty thick with the young boss, isn't she?" said the first speaker. "Not that I ever thought Chapin has the ropes on him she thinks she has. Wonder if he ever takes Inez out?"

"She'll have to be careful, if he does," put in another. "I'd hate to get in Miss Chapin's path. I'd expect to be waking up with a knife in my liver any morning."

"There's some scandal about Miss Lathrop, too," went on the first. "I know a girl over at Halsey's, where she worked before, and she told me that Inez said she was going to be married when she left there. They all clubbed together and gave her some linens."

"Will you shut up?" came a new voice, a voice Inez recognized as that of the receptionist, May Brian. "I like that girl."

"So do I, but that doesn't hinder her from having a Shady and Interesting Past. Besides, there was the mark of a wedding ring on her finger when she came here."

"Maybe it was an engagement ring," suggested May.

"No. It was the same size all around."

"Gee, you're observant, aren't you?" sarcastically. "Well, see that you get the news to Chapin as soon as she comes back."

"I will not! Let her find it out for herself!"

"What are you all talking about, anyway?" exclaimed a girl who had not yet spoken. "Inez is just substituting for Miss C. There won't be any clash because she'll be sent on her way."

Inez, chained to the couch by the impossibility of showing herself, felt a

pang at those words which nothing that had passed before had caused her.

She'll be sent on her way!

THE heart is a secret even to the one in whose breast it is carried. All afternoon she was conscious that those chance words, by chance overheard, had been like a flash of lightning revealing her to herself. Why was it that the thought of leaving seemed so intolerable? She liked her work, but there were other jobs in New York which she would find as interesting. Other work, yes, but no other Barry Schuyler to work for.

Why was it that she had broken off her married life with comparatively little suffering? Was it entirely because she had discovered Chester not essential to her happiness, after all, or because the place she imagined he filled had been immediately taken by some one else? Some one infinitely more interesting, infinitely superior? She had always realized that "Mr. Schuyler junior" was "interesting" to her. Was he not also dear?

The voice that every morning with
"Good day,"
Made each day good.

She'd read that somewhere, and how it expressed him! How true it was of his voice! And as she faced herself in her glass that night she knew that she loved him, loved him with a love she had not dreamed existed. She realized that she would stay in that office, if she could, for the sake of seeing him every day, even if she had to give up her good salary and good position; if she had to be the office girl or the scrubwoman.

"Just to be near him," she thought, "even if he didn't know I was there, I'd be a dog on the mat outside his door."

And she was spoiled—spoiled for him. No man in his position would look at a girl in hers, even if she came to him without a "shady" history.

"You haven't the strength of will to leave, yourself," she told her reflection. "It's good for you you'll have to!"

The days before Miss Chapin's return went on, and still he said nothing to her about her approaching departure.

Then Miss Chapin arrived, suddenly, a week before she was expected. She was a tall and stately person, outwardly poised and cool. Barry shook hands warmly and asked her how she was feeling. Then he introduced the two girls and said he wanted to consult them about a new arrangement.

"Miss Lathrop's been doing your work, and doing it very well, Miss Chapin," he began. "I feel she's an addition to the force, and don't want to lose her. There's more than enough work for one girl in this office—"

"But not enough for two," cut in Miss Chapin, after looking Inez over superciliously.

"No, but there will be if we bring those production records over here. I'm not at all satisfied with the way they're kept in Newark." (The type was set up, and plates made for their books across the river.) "If we bring that work into this office there'll be enough for both of you to handle, but we'll cut out most of the overtime racket—I've always felt guilty about that."

"Where will she sit?" asked Miss Chapin, who had taken her old desk as a matter of course.

"I'd thought of keeping her in here with me, and giving you a sanctum to yourself." He indicated the next room, a small office where he occasionally saw important customers.

"I'd rather have my own place," she said decidedly.

He yielded at once. "Very well. Then Miss Lathrop may have the boudoir."

The "boudoir" was luxuriously fitted up with a soft rug on the floor, a leather seat at one side, curtains with the firm's trade-mark embroidered on them at the windows, and a desk much handsomer than the one Inez had been using.

"Oh, Miss Chapin," she said, "you rate that much more than I do."

But Miss Chapin refused. She evidently preferred Barry's company to lonely grandeur.

AND from the moment of her entrance, the peace and pleasantness that had existed before were gone. She saw, or suspected, enough to be jealous; her own heart was fixed on her employer with a desperate regard, and she could not bear to see the friendliness—or was it more?—in his eyes when he looked at Inez. Within a day or two she had learned to hate, for many reasons, the girl who had taken her place in her absence. She hated her for her quiet efficiency; hated her because they received the same salary; hated her, most unreasonably, for having an office to herself.

"Where is your application blank?" she demanded one morning.

"I never made one out," said Inez in surprise.

"That's very irregular. Who hired you?"

"Mr. Barry himself."

"We call him Mr. Schuyler junior," said Miss Chapin, icily. "Will you please make one out now, so that the files can be kept straight?"

Inez took the blank and began to fill it out. She was hesitating over the item, "Reason for leaving last position," when a quick, sure step sounded in the corridor, and Barry came in. He laid a pile of reports on her desk, saying, "Can you go through these right away?" Then he saw what she was doing and, turning to Miss Chapin, asked, "Did you tell her to make this out? What's the idea?"

"It's customary, Mr. Barry," she answered smoothly. "For our records."

He picked up the form and crumpled it in his hand. "Oh, nonsense," he said, with an irritability entirely foreign to his nature. "We aren't so bound up in red tape as all that! Miss Lathrop has been here since the twelfth of May; she's part of us now."

He tossed the sheet into the waste-basket, not noticing how Miss Chapin's face contracted with fury. So he took the other's part against her, did he! And he knew exactly when the hated girl had started in!

Later in the day she asked him privately if he believed Inez "capable" of doing the work, and was told in no uncertain terms that he did. After that she did not dare to go to him with complaints against her "assistant," but she made Inez's life a burden in the many little ways known to feminine artifice. She would give a wrong idea of what she wanted, then find fault with the completed work; she magnified every slightest error and disregarded all good; she hindered and thwarted every effort Inez made. If Barry spoke to the girl Miss Chapin was sure to call her down at the next opportunity: "How dare you go over my head?" and a dozen times a day she said to her, "Really, I'd far prefer to do things myself in the first place to having to do them over after you!"

Meanwhile, Barry, with traditional

masculine obtuseness, moved serenely through the charged atmosphere, and apparently observed nothing. As he had promised, there was little or no night work now, and when there was, Miss Chapin did it.

But at last one evening, some weeks after her return, he came in at closing time and told them he would have to ask one of them to stay. "I guess Miss Lathrop is elected to-night," he said to his secretary. "You're going out, aren't you?"

For Miss Chapin was arrayed in her best finery. "Y-yes," she said dubiously; "but I could break my engagement."

"I couldn't allow it," he answered. "Miss Lathrop, are you busy, too?"

"No. I'll be glad to stay." She strove to keep her voice steady, dropped her eyes so that they might not betray the sudden deadly joy that surged through her. What a fool she was, what a fool! she told herself scathingly. To be so glad at the prospect of an hour alone with him, when she was no more to him than a piece of office furniture!

"We won't be long," he said when the others had gone. "I'm going to send out for a sandwich and a glass of beer. You want milk, I suppose—or shall I order two beers?"

"If you want the work done, better make it milk," she told him, ashamed to feel how her heart was leaping. Why was it that every smile he gave *her*, every little ordinary human kindness he showed, seemed so particularly for *her?* He was like that to everybody.

AFTER their brief repast together he went away and did not return until her task was almost finished. She typed on steadily without looking up, but she felt the dark eyes resting on her gravely, and it was hard to seem unmindful. At length he asked, "Inez, what's troubling you?"

She had never known before how sweet her own name could sound. She looked up at him, and suddenly he was standing beside her, and one brown hand closed around her wrist.

"Tell me," he said gently.

She shook her head. "It's nothing that matters."

"Miss Chapin's riding you, isn't she?"

She lowered her eyes, and did not answer. She was too much surprised at his understanding to know what to say.

"I'll fire her," he said fiercely.

"No, oh, no, please. It wouldn't be fair. She's a good worker, and you had her first."

"But I can't have a feud like this going on."

"Then it's my place to leave."

"Indeed, you'll do nothing of the sort. What would I do without you?"

She glanced up again and began to tremble as she met the look in his eyes. Then, neither of them quite meaning to nor quite knowing how it happened, his mouth closed down on hers. He drew away presently, and she shrank back, covering her face with her hands.

At length she whispered, "Now I'll *have* to go."

"Because of what I did?"

"No," was the honest answer. "Because of what I felt."

"Inez!" he cried gladly, and bent to her again. But she put her hand against his breast and held him from her. "Don't, please. You know it isn't right—you know I can't."

"Because you aren't free, dear?"

She nodded miserably, then shook her head. "No, it isn't that. I *am*

free, I suppose. Only when you know you won't—like me."

"Aren't you married?"

"No."

longed to some one else. Why haven't you told me?"

"You never asked," she said. "You've never referred to what I told

"You are still the wife of Chester Clough, and the marriage to my son was no marriage at all!"

"Well, then, my darling, what is there that's not right about this? I've tortured myself for months, loving you, wanting you, yet not daring to touch you because I thought you be-

you that first day. I thought that you weren't interested."

"Not interested!" he repeated. "What an expression! How could I ask you, dear, and try to force your

confidence? I thought you would tell me in your own good time if you wanted me to know."

So she told him.

Barry walked away to the window and stood with his back toward her, looking out at the darkness and the radiance of the city's night.

She faltered toward the last because she thought he was despising her. How could he love and respect her, now that he knew? Chester would have looked down on such a girl, she was sure. "She couldn't have been very much," he would have said, "or such a thing wouldn't have happened to her."

But young Mr. Schuyler was not Chester. He turned around at last and revealed to her his face, white under the tan, and his dark eyes blazing. "Inez," he said, "if I ever meet that skunk there won't be enough of him left to need a coffin. *Damn* him!"

THEN his look changed, and he came back to her. "You poor little kid," he said.

And somehow she was in his arms and crying her heart out on his shoulder. He drew her over to the wide leather seat and sat down, holding her, comforting her, kissing her.

"Dearest, dearest, don't cry so! It's all over now, and I'll never let anything hurt you again. Why, we won't even have to wait and bother about a divorce. You don't love him any more, do you?"

"I never really loved him, Barry. I just imagined I did. But even if I had, how could I love him after that?"

"Then, Inez—do you feel just a little as I feel for you?"

"I feel too much," she whispered.

The answer to that was another kiss, fiercer than those tender, comforting ones. "There could never be too much," he whispered back. "The world's not big enough to hold it. We'll be married soon—soon—and begin to live."

"No. Oh, Barry, no! I'm afraid."

"Are you afraid I'll play you a trick like that?"

"No—no! But I'm afraid *for* you, dear. You deserve some one so much better than I am, some one all your own."

"I couldn't find any one better in the whole earth," he told her. "And if you love me now, won't you be all my own?"

"We'll have to wait," she whispered.

"But why, dear, why?"

"It hardly seems decent not to," she answered. "It isn't a year yet since I married that other."

He was quiet for a long time.

"Barry," she murmured presently. "If—if I get married again, will I have to get an annulment?"

"Not in New York State. *When* you get married again you won't even have to mention that experience. There are some States where you'd have to be freed from a bigamous marriage, but not here."

"But I was just the same as married, Barry. I thought I was. I had a real wedding—and I have my certificate to show you."

"My dear, you don't need any documentary evidence. I know you were married, as far as you were concerned. But it wasn't valid, so doesn't count in law."

She shuddered a little. "Then it's the same as if I'd lived with him without being married?"

"In the eyes of the Empire State, yes, dear. But *we* know, and after all it's the concern of no one else. It will be a great deal easier this way. We

won't have to go through a trial, nor tell the whole world our story. Even my father needn't know. He'd never understand."

"He'd think it wasn't fair to you," she said, "and I'm not sure he wouldn't be right."

But Barry looked at her and drowned all doubts in the glowing of his eyes.

Then he began to plead again. "Dearest, you know I've got to go away to England soon. I'll be there for two months," he said; "perhaps longer. That means I'll be apart from you for almost three. Dearest, come with me on the trip. How can you be so cruel?"

But she shook her head, and he could not change her. "No, Barry, no. Love failed me once, and though I know you're different from—*him*—I'm afraid to trust it again. This separation will prove to us whether we really care."

"Can you doubt it?" he asked her, with his lips on hers again.

She answered his kiss, but there was no yielding in the look she gave him. "It won't fail us that same way—no. But there'll be something else, something we've never thought of. I want to wait, I want to be sure, I want you to be sure. Oh, please understand."

He put her aside and walked to the window again and stood there, his hands in his pockets, his head bent. By and by she followed him and laid her hand on his arm.

"Barry? You're not angry with me?"

He patted the hand gently. "No. I *do* understand, in a way, although nothing could make me surer than I am. Will you marry me as soon as I come back?"

"After we get acquainted again."

"And how long do you plan for that to take?"

"We'll talk about it then," she said.

SO Barry went away to open an office in England, having first made the diplomatic move of his career. Inez was to take Miss Chapin's place, working directly under his father, and Miss Chapin was promoted to be production manager at the New Jersey plant. The mixed feelings with which she received this information were plainly to be read in her face, and the girls suspected that if Mr. Schuyler junior had not been on the point of departure, she would have refused the honor. Under the circumstances she could not refuse, however, and she took herself and her mixed feelings away the week before he sailed.

In their daily letters to each other the lovers grew even closer than they had been before. Inez lived for the days when the square envelopes with the London post marks, three or four at a time, were waiting for her when she went home. She spent her evenings reading them and answering them, and because she was not reserved on paper, and let herself go more than she ever had when with him, the man came to believe in the strength of her affection more than he had dared to do before.

"I know now why you wouldn't come with me," he wrote once. "You wanted me to see what a gorgeous correspondent you are. But not even such letters can console me forever for this separation. I want to see, and kiss, the hand that writes them. Some day I'm going to steal the crown jewels out of the Tower (try and get 'em any other way!) and bring them home to put on that little hand."

Or, "I've been to the movies—they

call them the *kinema* here. I bought two seats and pretended you were with me. We walked home in the fog, and stopped on Westminster Bridge to watch the prickly silhouette of the Parliament houses through the dimness. Some day you'll be really along, my darling, and see all these places that are only names to you now, as you say, out of Dickens—and my letters."

Sometimes Inez, sitting demure and patient at her typewriter, would look at her employer's forbidding face and wonder what he would say if he could read the letter that lay in the bosom of her dress. Like the heroine of an old-fashioned book, she carried Barry's latest missive about with her.

This was love—Love! Oh, why hadn't she waited? Why had she accepted the counterfeit offered her before? She hadn't known, that's all—that was her only excuse. It made her ashamed, now, to think how mistaken she had been, both in the capacity of her own heart and the man who had seemed to hold it. She felt cheapened by that first experience, and her whole being overflowed with gratitude toward Barry because he did not think her so.

When the glorious day of his return came at last she was in no mood to deny him anything he asked. He telephoned her on his way home the evening that he landed; it was a Saturday and they could spend the whole of the next day together. He had to see his father first.

And in that interview he broke their news. Inez was never told the details of the conversation, though she knew it had been a stormy one. But the young man had a will to match the old one's own, coupled with more steadiness of temper in exerting it, and he emerged triumphant.

Barron Schuyler senior had always been an indulgent father to this, his only son, and in the gladness of reunion he felt, perhaps, more expansive than usual. Besides, he liked Inez. No employer could have helped admiring her dependability, her appearance, the cheerful, businesslike attitude she brought to her work. One condition he hoped they would observe: to come and live with him.

"You're all I have, boy," he said at last, "and this great place has been like a tomb without you. I'd have preferred a richer girl for a daughter, a handsomer and more sophisticated one, but I guess you're old enough to know your own mind. If she's your choice, I'll try to make her welcome . . . But when I think of that little minx! Working under my eye all these months, and I never suspected!"

SO they were married and began their idyll.

The experiences of that first year would have made Inez happy even with no Barry to share them. Luxury — advantages — freedom — travel — and a perfect lover. What more could woman's heart desire? Twice he took her with him on business trips to England, and then, during the printers' slack time "between seasons," they traveled to Italy together.

"One country at a time, and that done well," said Barry. "Besides, Venice and Florence were made for honeymoons, and this is ours."

They returned a few days before their first anniversary, and found they had the great house on Park Avenue to themselves. Mr. Schuyler had moved to his club, the butler informed them.

Barry looked rather puzzled after a telephone conversation with his father. "Sounds grouchy," he commented.

"Won't come over to dinner. Guess I'd better run down this evening and see what's wrong—he's tied the office up in a bow knot, I'll bet!"

"Well," said Inez, "now you're back it will all be straightened out again."

"Go on," he told her, with his infectious grin. "Kid me. I like it."

"I'm not kidding you, dear." She drew closer to him and ran her fingers through his hair. "You are the light that drives away the darkness, everywhere you go."

"Do you care so much?" he whispered in a kiss. "Have I made you happy, dear?"

"Happy! Barry, you invented that word! I'm so happy that when I stop to think about it, I hold my breath, for fear that it can't last."

"Silly girl!" he chided her. "How can it help lasting? Lasting," he went on, very low, "and getting better all the time?"

Barry was never cross, nor tired, nor blue—that was one reason why life with him was so wonderful. And tonight he seemed gayer than usual, glad to be home, glad to be alone with her, glad just to be alive.

But after dinner he had to leave her while he went to interview his father, and it was late before his knock sounded at her door. He wore a sober expression when he entered, and came to sit on her dressing-table bench beside her.

"Well, honey," he said, "that trouble you were looking for has arrived."

"Oh, Barry! What!"

He laughed. "Nothing to look *that* frightened about, anyway. Dad wants me to go West for him, and I don't see how I can take you with me. Chicago, Indianapolis, Kingsport, Tennessee—he's got an itinerary mapped out that will keep me jumping."

"Oh, Barry! Our anniversary!"

"I won't leave until the day after, dear. Told him I couldn't be away from you then. So he said he'd stay at the club until afterward, and let us spend it alone together. Something's upset him, though, and he wouldn't tell me what it is. Maybe he's fired all the best people in the plant—I'll have to go down to-morrow and see." His arms closed about her. "I'm sorry for my father, Inez," he told her. "He's such a lonely old boy, yet he wants us to have the Day of Days by ourselves."

ON the second day after Barry left, Inez was sitting reading his first letter—"a hurried one, darling, but I'll write again to-night"—when the butler came to say Mr. Schuyler wished to see her in his study. There was something about the tone of the message that startled the girl. The sight of her father-in-law, stern and white behind his desk, did nothing to dispel her premonition. She felt suddenly like a child on the verge of punishment, and had the impulse to hide behind the chair he indicated, rather than to sit on it. By an effort, however, she held herself upright and tried to seem at ease. Her conciliatory smile at him was answered by a heavy frown.

"Inez," he said, in a voice she had never heard before, often as she had seen him under the stress of anger, "I knew, of course, that my son married a nobody, a penniless girl who by some underhand means had blinded him to his duty and even to his own best interest. I tried to reconcile myself to the marriage because he seemed happy in it. I did not know that you are a worthless, unscrupulous adventuress,

and had duped him into marrying another man's discarded wife."

Inez's heart was pounding so she could scarcely breathe. She put up her hands as if to ward off blows. "Stop! Stop!" she cried. "You have no right to speak like this to me. Barry knows. I told him the whole story long before we were married."

"How dare you tell me that?" he demanded.

"It is the truth!"

"Do you expect me to believe that my son — *my son* — would bring into this house a woman who confessed she was married to another man, would go through a form of ceremony with her, and present her to his dead mother's friends as his own wife?"

"But I wasn't married to the other man," said Inez. "Oh, what have you been told? I lived with him, believing we were married, but all the time he had another wife. And Barry said I didn't need an annulment in New York State; that we needn't have any publicity—"

"I doubt that very much," he cut in coldly. "My son would never have stooped to deceive me, no matter what wiles you used to impose upon him. But, young woman, if you are sincere in your belief that you were free when you married Barry, I have to inform you that you were not. Miss Chapin came and told me what she had discovered—"

So Miss Chapin was behind all this, thought Inez wearily. She might have known. That implacable woman would lie in wait to injure her until they both were gray.

"She had met the landlady at the house where you lived with Chester Clough, and the woman told her that you had been there for some months, posing as the fellow's wife; then his real wife appeared and drove you away."

"Let me tell you what happened," the girl begged.

"It is not necessary. You cannot gloss over the facts. I investigated. The report came some time ago, but I waited until my son was gone before approaching you. That's why I've absented myself from my own home these past days—because I could not bear to see you together. Inez Lathrop Clough, the detective I employed, ferreted out this Annie Barnes and got the truth from her. It was she who was not married to Clough!"

"But—but she showed me her ring," said Inez stupidly.

"Her ring!" was the contemptuous retort, accompanied by a sound only to be described as snorting. "Since when has a ring constituted a legal marriage? She showed the ring to my detective, too, and the only other thing she had to show was a piece of paper on which she herself had copied out her mother's marriage certificate for them both to sign. That was *her* idea of a binding ceremony!"

Inez, on her feet, was gazing at him with a face of horror. "And that was *all?*" she breathed. "She never went to a minister with him, or—or a justice of the peace?"

"No," he mimicked her, "she never went to a minister with him, *nor* to a justice of the peace. Therefore, *you* are still his wife, and the marriage to my son was no marriage at all!"

THE girl gripped the back of her chair, for the room was swirling round her. All this had happened before. Where? When? Once before she had gone through this same experience, of being told that her husband was not her husband after all.

But that other time it had not been like this. It had not been Barry she was losing, Barry, the other part of her soul. She had been free then, too; there had been no—

Dizzy, faint, sick, she stood there swaying, and the man, because there was a strain of human kindness in him after all, or perhaps simply because he did not want a scene, touched a bell and summoned the butler.

"Bring this woman a glass of wine," he said, and to her, curtly, "Sit down."

She obeyed, sinking into the chair, grasping its arms and striving, with a tremendous effort of her will, to keep from fainting. She drank the wine the servant brought her, drained it to the last drop, though her teeth chattered against the glass.

Then, once more alone with Mr. Schuyler, she looked up at him. "What can I do?" she whispered brokenly.

"You shall leave this house at once. You shall sign an agreement releasing my son from all obligation toward you. You are getting off lightly—you are liable to a prosecution for bigamy. But to avoid scandal I will keep silence, and in addition will give you my personal check for twenty thousand dollars."

"Twenty thousand dollars!" cried Inez hysterically, and began to laugh.

"It isn't enough, I suppose?" he sneered. "Well, if you will undertake never to seek Barry out again, to sink out of his sight and never let him know where you are, I will pay you in addition ten thousand a year for the next ten years, or leave instructions with my executors to pay you out of my estate."

But Inez waved the check away. "I don't want it," she said. "I have some money in the house—enough to live on until I can think what I'm going to do."

"What guarantee have I that you won't bother him again? You cheated me before."

She sprang up then, and honest anger did for her at last what grief and shock had failed to do.

"You may rest assured," she cried, "that I will never *bother him* again!"

Then she turned and fled to her own room, the room that sang of Barry's presence. Pictures of him gazed at her from every wall. She sat down, holding her head in her hands, and tried to plan what she should take with her. Her lingerie and stockings; the two or three plain, serviceable dresses that she owned; her purse with a little over one hundred dollars in it—

She stopped. Perhaps she had no right to refuse the money that the old man offered her . . .

But she shook her head. She could not go back again to face his insults and his sneers. She got up and began to walk about the room, getting her things together. She unfastened from its place the picture of her husband—of Barry—that she loved the best. The strong face with the humorous curve of the lips, and the splendor of the eyes—those fine and steadfast eyes which would never look into hers again!

She went into his room to say good-by to it, let her hands rest on the things that were dear to her because he had used them. This time, too, she wrote a note to the husband she was leaving; but oh, what a different one!

MY DARLING:

I cannot stay here any more because I am not really your wife. Your father will explain. I love you, and shall always love you. My life has been a heaven since you came into it, and no

matter what comes to me in the years ahead, I can endure it because of the perfect memories that you have given me.

I love you. I love you enough to want you to be happy, even though I have no part in your happiness. So you must begin by forgetting

INEZ.

She put the note into the inner pocket of his quilted dressing gown, where nobody else would see it. And she clasped her arms about the gown, buried her face in its soft folds, clung to it desperately as if it had been Barry himself, clung in an anguish too deep for tears. "How can I go? How can I leave you? Oh, Barry, Barry!"

A weight was pressing against her brain, and her heart ached with a physical pain so great that she had to bite her lips to keep from crying aloud.

And now he would never know—never, never know.

SO Inez was once more alone to face the battle of existence. She got a room in a cheap boarding house, but how could she get a position with no reference to give?

Two weary months dragged by. She owed for her board and room at the last; she could never afford to eat at noon; her clothes began to look shabby, her stockings overdarned; she had no relaxation, for at night she had not the strength to walk, and the movies, which might have given her a cheap release from worry and from pain, were beyond her purse.

No such great good fortune as had led her to Barry in the first place came her way now. Agency after agency, employer after employer, turned her away. Lonely night after lonely night she went home to throw herself on her hard, narrow bed, and lie, wide-eyed, watching the ugly buildings across the court as their windows flamed with light or gaped in the darkness.

Remembering, remembering. The way he turned his head, the way he moved his hands—

Often she did not sleep until the rattle of milk cans in the street and the rumble of trucks proclaimed the coming of the city's day.

At last she began to realize that she was being unfair to some one else; after all, she was responsible now for another life than her own. She decided that if one more week went by without finding work she would lower her pride and go back to old Mr. Schuyler to accept his help for Barry's child. But in that week, the tenth since she had left the home where she had been so happy, the despaired-of position materialized. It was only a twenty-dollar one, but it would keep body and soul together; it was hard and exacting work and would likewise serve to employ her thoughts by day.

Somehow she lived, or, rather, stayed alive.

Evenings she washed her undies, and pressed her dress, and mended stockings; Sundays after church she went to the library and read. Week-ends were the worst, of course. The thought of the man she loved pulled like a cord at her heart every hour of her life, but the days when she had nothing to do were almost past bearing. Saturday afternoons, when it was lovely, she would get on top of a bus and ride up Riverside. The fleet was in, and she liked to watch the progress of the great new bridge across the Hudson. But always the cord tugged at her heart, making it ache with an all-but-intolerable pain.

Everywhere she knew that she was watching, watching for one dark face, one lithe figure. In every crowd, in

every subway train, in every taxi that passed her as she stood waiting for traffic to change, she longed and dreaded to see the eyes she loved and had lost.

Summer came, and she began to be conscious that she could not work much longer. She had made her plans now. She would go home to Annie's Aunt Molly for the last few weeks. Barry knew about her, of course, but Aunt Molly could be trusted to keep a secret.

Then, before she could resign from her position, she was asked to leave. It was a new and humiliating experience, but Inez's spirit was by this time too broken to protest or try to defend herself. She took the twenty-dollar-bill he handed her in place of notice, went back to her cheerless room, and packed her scanty wardrobe. She seemed always, she thought desolately, to be packing up and moving on. And what if she got home and found Aunt Molly gone?

BUT Aunt Molly was not gone. At the end of her journey, Inez dragged her suitcase up the village street and saw across the picket fence the familiar ample figure on her knees among her old-fashioned perennials.

The old lady looked up at the pale, exhausted face, dropped her trowel and the lengths of trailing myrtle at which she had been digging, rose cumbrously to her feet, and came to fold Inez in her motherly arms. At first she asked no questions, but only, with a series of sympathetic noises such as an agitated hen might have made, led the girl inside, placed her on the wide, soft couch in the cool, darkened living room, and took off her hat and coat and shoes.

Then she bustled away to get the newcomer something to eat and drink, and although Inez could not touch the food she drank gratefully.

Finally Aunt Molly sat down beside her, rocking creakily, and began to talk.

"Your husband has been here seeking you, Inez," she said. "And he told me everything, but not—this."

"He didn't know," whispered Inez. "Tell me—how did Barry look?"

"Look? The boy was white and sick with the worry you've caused him. How should he look? He's been here twice, and the second time he was that hopeless it would break your heart." She broke off suddenly. "When are you expecting it, dearie?"

"In about six weeks."

"Dear, dear, and himself not knowing! It's telegraphing him I'll be doing, as soon as I get my breath."

But Inez started up wildly.

"No, no! Oh, Aunt Molly, you mustn't! Don't you know that I couldn't bear to see him? Don't you understand that the only thing that keeps me going at all is that I don't have to fight him?"

"You and that Annie!" exclaimed the old woman. "Running away from those who love you, and harassing us out of our minds. If I had her here I'd knock your two heads together!"

Inez reached over and kissed the mouth that was scolding her. "Go on," she said. "Say whatever you like to me. Oh, why didn't I come back to you months ago?"

Aunt Molly brushed her hand across her eyes. "Because you've no sense, I reckon. No more than that Annie."

"Aunt Molly, have you heard anything about Annie?"

"Sure I have. Your Barry hunted her out and made her write to me. And —do you ever look in the papers?"

"Not lately. I've not been interested, somehow."

"You wouldn't be," said Aunt Molly, with a large contempt. "And the news they may be having for you any day now! Not that they know the whole of it, at that."

"Tell me—Aunt Molly, tell me!"

"You don't deserve to hear a word of it, but I will tell you. When Barry came here first he had it all mapped out to get you a divorce, and marry you again. And then it turns out that Annie has a new baby, too—it's a girl, hers is—and now she's fighting for her rights, and your Barry is backing her. With no sense and no money, like she has, she'd never have got anywhere, but Barry has plenty of both, and since he saw her and heard her story he thought maybe she could prove her marriage was legal, after all. It's all come out in court, about her ring and her paper that villain gave her—they lived in Jersey, and that helps somehow, though I'm not clear about it—and it's up to the judge now. It may be a couple of weeks before the decision is handed down, but there's a chance for both of you. Think what it'll mean to you, dearie! It's for you Barry is doing it, and there's no doubt of that. For if Annie is a lawful wife, then you were free when you married him, and everything's all right, after all."

"It's for you Barry is doing it!" Inez hugged the precious words to her heart. They were like manna to the perishing. Still working for her, still loving her, after the cruel months of silence!

"Now," went on Aunt Molly, "will you let me telegraph him?"

But the girl clung to her arm. "Not yet, not now," she said. "Promise me not to until the thing's decided!"

"And what if something happens to the two of you meanwhile? What explanation will I be giving Barry then?"

"Nothing will happen, dear. We'll be all right, now that we're home."

"Well, will you let me wire him when it's decided, whether the judge says yes or no?"

Inez hesitated.

"I'll not keep silent an hour longer unless you promise to let him know the minute we hear what the judge says," Aunt Molly told her firmly. "Anyway, with a man like Barry, the judge's saying 'no' would only be the signal for him to start something else, and I'll not have him worried any more."

"All right," said Inez. "As soon as we hear the decision, whatever it is—"

She broke off, for a white-hot knife had been thrust into her side. A shudder passed over her from head to foot, and her grasp on the old woman's arm tightened. She set her teeth, and the eyes that met the aged, kindly ones were dark with anguish and with fear.

"What is it, dearie?" cried Aunt Molly. "Oh!" She got to her feet, lumbered to the door, then hastened back again and folded Inez in her arms. "Dearie, dearie," she murmured, "try to think it'll only be a day out of your life, and then you'll have your baby!"

SO Inez went down to the Gates of Life, which seem so much more, sometimes, like the Gates of Death, and brought back a child that lay upon her breast and looked at her with Barry's eyes. Little and perfect and strong.

It was three weeks later and she was downstairs again when the paper with the judge's decision in it finally came. Annie had won! The wise old man had upheld the legality of that strange marriage, and Inez caught her breath, real-

izing what this would mean to her and the little new born thing upstairs. The newspaper carried an editorial on the case, and over and over she read the precious words:

> How can we say the judge is wrong? No one could read the printed lines before us without pausing to reflect that such things as they recount do often happen. To believe that in fact they did happen to Annie Barnes and Chester Clough is not to stamp one as too gullible. To the wisdom of the trial judge the law confides the duty of appraisal. It is not likely that these witnesses imposed upon the credulity of an experienced fact-finder. His was the opportunity, the responsibility, and the power to decide.

Oh, no need to hold Barry away from her longer; no one could ever again dispute their right to each other. She would call him now—hear that deep, rich voice at last, tell him her glorious news—and before another twenty-four hours he would be with her, and they would never be separated any more.

She started up, with Aunt Molly's name on her lips, but the call was never uttered. Her husband was standing in the doorway. For a long, long moment he confronted her, and then they were in each other's arms again.

It was an eternity before either could speak, or felt the need for speaking. Then Barry said, "Inez, I won't reproach you—I'll never refer to this again—but there's one thing that you've got to promise me. Whatever happens in the future, whoever tries to part us, we'll face it out together. No matter what it is, it can never be so bad while we have each other. Do you realize what you've put me through?"

"Don't I know what it has meant to me?" she whispered. "Darling, I promised your father, and besides I thought it was easier—safer—not to see each other. It tore my heart in two. But I couldn't have borne it to be with you and not—not your wife any more."

The pressure of his arms increased. "And I didn't know whether you were ill, or in want—even if you were alive," he said. "It was terrible. And all so unnecessary, if we'd only known! Father wants me to ask you to forgive him, my dearest; to come back to us and start over again."

"I thought I never could forget the things he said," she answered, "but I could forgive anybody anything today. Anyway, he believed that he was justified."

"Inez—you haven't promised me yet. You'll never, for any conceivable reason, leave me alone again?"

"Never!" she promised. "No matter what happens."

Their lips met in a kiss of utter surrender, absolute understanding. Then he gently set her on her feet.

"Go get your hat and coat," he said. "Don't bother about your other things. As soon as the case was decided I brought Annie and her baby here to stay with Aunt Molly. They don't need us now. We'll say good-by to them, and then we're going home."

He walked to the foot of the stairs with her and stood, still clinging to her hand and arm as if he could not bear to let her go. She started to mount the steps; then she looked down on him, and in her face there shone a radiance ineffable.

"Come up with me," she said, "and meet your son."

The End.

BARRY looked amazed, incredulous, bewildered; his grasp on her arm tightened. "Inez? You said—you mean?"

"Yes," she whispered. "Come."

They went up the stairs together, his arm about her shoulders, hers about his waist. Suddenly he stopped, and cupped her chin in his hand, gazing down into her eyes as if he would read her soul.

"Beautiful? It isn't true! It can't be!"

"Come," she repeated.

And she led him to the room where the child lay sleeping.

He went down on his knees by the bed and touched with one reverent finger the roseleaf hand.

His wife sat on a low chair at the head of the couch, and presently he turned to her, hid his face in her breast, flung his arms forward, about her. He was in the grip of an emotion beyond words. At last he raised his head and his eyes met hers through welling tears.

She took his face between her hands. "Barry! Barry!" she pleaded. "Don't take it like this. Beloved, we are done with suffering. It's all right now, and we'll never be parted any more, and there'll be three of us instead of two."

"How old is he?" he whispered.

"Twenty-two days old," proudly.

"Where were you when—he came?"

"Here with Aunt Molly, dear. It was all as easy for me as it could have been without you."

He kissed her hands, the lace at the neck of her dress. "I can't bear it," he said brokenly. "The thought of you alone—trying to go to work—uncared for—unloved—when you had *this* to bear, besides."

"Darling, darling, don't you understand?" she murmured. "It was the hope of him that kept me alive. It was the only thing that I had left to live for—to see your baby—to hold him in my arms—"

His breath was coming in sobs, but gradually, as they held each other, he grew calmer.

And Inez talked to him tenderly, almost gayly; for once the weaker of these two was the stronger. "Wait till he wakes up," she said, "and I can show you how cute and funny he is. His eyes are just like yours, lover—and I'm so glad. I hoped all the time they would be. But I guess we'll have to wait till to-morrow to take him home—all the paraphernalia that's necessary, you've no idea . . . Did you bring the big car?"

His head moved in assent.

"It's a good thing. We'll put him to bed on the back seat; he'll probably sleep most of the way home. Home! Oh, Barry, won't it be joyful, joyful, joyful?"

Still mute, he came even nearer, in one lithe movement, and she clasped him close, and laid her cheek against the darkness of his hair.

At seventeen Robin was wistful and exquisitely lovely

The Strangest Heritage

Her dream ship waiting to bear her to dreams-come-true! Instead, destiny lay in wait beyond the gang-plank for timid Robin, heiress to—what?

By Marthe Neville

EVERY day at eleven o'clock, unless it was raining, Robin, accompanied by Madame Angèle, appeared in the Bois. At her first appearance madame had led her by the hand, a little yellow-haired child in fluffy white skirts, with a wide straw hat tied under her tiny pointed chin and shading her big brown eyes. Each year the fluffy skirts had grown a bit longer and less fluffy as Robin's slim legs had lengthened. Madame no longer held her hand, but her guardianship was just as rigid, and the girl's manner as shy as at that first appearance.

At seventeen Robin was wistful and exquisitely lovely with the quaint dignity and reticence of the French-reared maiden and the beauty of an American girl.

For three mornings a young man, sitting on a bench in the park, had watched the old woman in her stiff black skirts and the lovely daffodil-like girl stroll by, and wondered who they were; for three mornings Robin's eyes, downcast, had glanced under inky lashes in his direction, and she also had wondered who he was.

Then the fourth morning Robin had tripped along the pavement alone, and the young man, seeing her, had arisen from the green bench, stood hesitant with his cap in his hand, and half smiled, and she had smiled back. And now they were sitting under the chestnut trees side by side.

"I shouldn't be here," Robin said. "Madame Angèle has warned me never to speak to strangers."

"I'm not a stranger," laughed Derry Conway. "I'm an American. So are you."

Robin shook her head, and the silken curls that covered it gleamed in the sunlight. "No. I was born in Paris, and I've lived here all my life. But my father is an American, and so was my mother. She is dead."

Derry expressed his sympathy by placing a bronzed, well-kept hand on hers. "I've never seen you with your father."

"No. He lives in New York. Some times"—Robin's velvet eyes clouded—"he visits me—not often. He is rich, and has so much business to attend to it's hard for him to come over here. I hardly know him. Madame says when I am eighteen I'm to go to New York to live. I shall be very glad, for it is lonely here—at times."

"Lonely, in Paris!"

"I haven't any friends, you see," she said simply.

"But the theaters, the restaurants, the art galleries—"

"I have never been to a theater nor a restaurant. When I'm eighteen I shall go," Robin answered. "With madame I have visited the Louvre and the opera, but nothing else. She says the quiet life is best for me."

Derry looked at her in amazement. Her slow, wistful smile met his glance. "You are the first man I've ever spoken to, except our *concierge*," she said; "and Mr. Thompson who taught me English. It is very pleasant to speak to a young man, if I did not feel I was disobeying madame. Madame has a headache," she added.

"I'm going back to New York tomorrow," said Derry, "or we'd have a lot of talks. Whatever your madame says, I think it's all wrong for a young girl not to have companionship. Gee, I'm glad we got this chance before I had to leave! I've been crazy to meet you since the first time I saw you go by."

"I have wanted to know you," Robin said. Only shyness prevented her from telling him that since the first morning her brown eyes had met his clear gray ones she had thought of him constantly, and had chafed at the set rules of Madame Angèle. Until then she had never been *really* lonely, nor wondered why the old house in Passy knew no visitors, why everything that other girls delighted in was denied her.

"Maybe," said Derry eagerly, "when you come to New York we will meet again. Here is my card." Robin took the bit of cardboard and read his name and the address. "If you call me up I'll show you the city."

"It is a year before I am eighteen," she said sadly. "Perhaps you will have forgotten me by then."

"Never." His hand touched hers again. Not quite understanding the tingle that went all through her, Robin

moved away slightly. "I couldn't forget you. You're the prettiest girl I ever—"

Robin rose quickly, interrupting what he might have said. A maid in uniform was coming toward them, running across the pavement regardless of passing motor cars and busses. "Nanette!" Robin gasped. "Oh, dear, madame will be angry if she knows I have spoken to you. Please — please go—before Nanette reaches me!"

HER face had grown pale, and Derry realizing she was in deadly earnest, rose also. "I'm sailing on the Verna," he said hastily, "from Havre. Drop me a line. Au revoir."

"Au revoir!" Robin whispered, just as the maid joined them.

"Mademoiselle!" she cried. "Quick! Come home. There is a cablegram—monsieur, your father—"

"My father is coming?" The color returned to Robin's soft cheeks.

"No, no, my dear! He is dead."

"Dead!" Robin swayed and stumbled blindly against the woman, who put a thick arm about the slender shoulders to support her. During the brief walk Nanette explained. A cablegram from Mr. Brent's lawyer, Shelby Landon, had arrived a few moments after Robin had left the house. Madame Angèle had sent her out at once to find the girl. Robin must go to America immediately, so the cablegram said. Mr. Landon was her guardian from now on. She was a great heiress, and he wished her near him.

"America, at once!" breathed Robin. "Is that New York?"

"Perhaps. Madame Angèle will know. She is too ill to go with you. We must prepare everything. Tomorrow, perhaps, you sail."

To-morrow! Even the shock of learning that the only parent she had was dead—a father she had scarcely known—could not banish the sudden thought that the handsome young man she had just spoken to was sailing in the morning. Perhaps they might sail upon the same ship. If madame was too ill to make arrangements, then Robin must do it herself, and—

She found madame gray-faced and in great anguish, lying in her darkened boudoir. The old lady, who had been mother, nurse, and governess to Robin all her seventeen years, opened her arms and cuddled the girl against her deep bosom. "My little one," she murmured. "You must leave me. I cannot go with you. I am too old for a new country. I have too many ties here. But how I shall miss you!"

Robin cried a little. She could not really mourn her father, the strange, stern man who had never shown her any affection, and, save for the monthly checks, had shown no indication that he cared for her. But she loved madame, and she was fearful of going alone, though the thought thrilled her a bit.

She read the cablegram over several times, wondered what the lawyer who had sent it was like; then, while madame tried to banish her migraine, helped Nanette pack her huge black trunk and a shining new bag. With Nanette she went to the American consul and explained the urgent necessity of a hasty passport, then to the French Line offices to secure passage upon a ship. To her great relief the first vessel sailing was the Verna, the boat of which Derry Conway had spoken.

The roll of bills in American money dismayed the girl. Never in her life had she so much as handled a hundred francs. Madame had done everything

for her. When Nanette gave her her passport and her tickets she began to tremble. She was going a long way, across the ocean, all by herself, and she might never see good Nanette and dear old madame again. It was terrifying.

The following morning madame was still too ill to accompany her charge to Havre. But, pale and red-eyed, the old lady went with Robin to the station, and gave her many admonitions.

"You are very rich, chérie. There will be many men who will wish to marry you. But all of them will not be gentlemen nor truly love you. I shall not be there to guide you, so do as the attorney, Monsieur Landon, tells you. I hope you do not love soon. I hope you never love. It causes only unhappiness, the love, and there is no need of it in your life; you have everything without it. Position, wealth—you do not need to marry."

"But I want to marry some time," said Robin. "I'd hate to be a spinster. And while I hope I shan't be foolish, I know it would be dreadful never to fall in love."

"I shall pray the good God that you never do," whispered madame, holding her close in her arms and letting the tears roll down her withered cheeks. "Love is not for you, little one. I cannot tell you the reason why, but it is not for you. Your father wished that never would you marry."

"My father is dead," Robin said, her chin quivering. "If I fall in love he will not be hurt. I'm coming back to you, madame, just as soon as I'm of age, and I shall always, always love you."

AFTER many kisses, many tears, many embraces, she followed the porter who carried her bags into the train, found a compartment with only two persons in it, and seated herself. She waved her hand, clutching tightly the strip of green ticket, at madame, blew kisses to Nanette, then settled back against the dingy gray plush of her chair, and closed her eyes. It had all happened so quickly there had been no time for thought, for tears; but now that the train was speeding away from the only home she had ever known, a great ache filled Robin's heart. America! New York! A strange, vast country. A strange, vast city. A new guardian and wealth. And she was so ignorant. She knew nothing of the world. Madame had warned her against love, and yet in all the books she had read love was the only thing in the world that mattered.

Money meant nothing to her. She had never had any of her own, yet because she had become an heiress it seemed to mean more than anything to madame. Two tears trickled from under her closed lids and rolled down her cheeks.

"What's the matter?" A hand touched hers.

Robin looked into a pair of very bright hazel eyes that held a whimsical twinkle in them; then her gaze enveloped the girl's face. The stranger had very yellow hair, much more yellow than Robin's, with a reddish glint in it, a very red, full-lipped mouth and very red cheeks. She was pretty, but there was a metallic something about her beauty, something that would have informed an older, wiser person that nature had been assisted in more ways than one to achieve that coloring. She was a slight girl, not slight with adolescence as was Robin, but slender through careful diet and exercise. She was about Robin's height, possibly a little taller, and dressed a trifle flamboyantly, with a red felt hat, a flaming

plaid scarf and a tweed suit with flecks of green and red in the fabric.

Her smile, white-toothed and wide, was encouraging and friendly. Robin smiled back.

"Hate to leave Paris?"

Robin nodded. She wiped her eyes with a wisp of handkerchief.

"So do I. Gosh, it's a great city, isn't it? I never thought I'd like any place better'n New York, but I've got some crush on Paree."

"I've never been in New York," Robin said, "so I cannot say how well I will like it. But I am going there."

"Yes? Aren't you from the States?"

"No. Paris is my home — er — it has been until now. I think New York will be my home in future. Of course it depends upon my guardian."

"Guardian?" The hazel eyes shifted quickly. "So you've got a guardian?"

"Yes. I'm an orphan, so of course I have a guardian."

"I'm an orphan, too," laughed the other, "but you don't see any guardian looking out for me."

"Oh, then, perhaps" — Robin's cheeks grew a shade pinker—"perhaps you haven't much money?"

"Not so's you can notice it, I haven't. It took all I could beg, borrow or steal to make this trip. Now I'm beating it back to the department store with the knowledge I'm a dismal failure."

"Failure?" How strangely she speaks, thought Robin, who had never heard anything but the most pedantic English spoken.

"Yes. Like most of us poor working girls who save all our dough to cross the big pond, I hoped to annex myself a husband via the voyage. I discovered the animals are scarce. Them that aren't tied already want ladies with the cash. I have none, so—" She made an expressive gesture with her right hand.

"You mean men only want to marry girls with money!" Robin gasped.

"I mean they fall in love with a girl with money a lot easier than they do with the ones without."

"Madame said—" Robin hesitated. "Don't you believe in romance? Perhaps you have never met the man you will love, or who is intended for you."

"My dear!" The yellow-haired girl leaned forward until her face almost touched Robin's, and as she did so she glanced at the stout Frenchman and his wife who occupied the compartment with them. "Romance is as dead as Napoleon. I know. I'm not hard on the eyes, I'm clever, and I work hard. You could be as ugly as sin, but if you're rich (I got a hunch *you* are, from the guardian thing), you'd have fifty proposals to my one. Grant you I want to make a good match. I don't want to live in a two-room flat in the Bronx and pay half the rent myself. But even the chaps I run around with at home are looking for rich widows or girls with a job better than theirs."

Robin's candid eyes widened. "I don't want to believe that," she said slowly. "I want to believe love is beautiful, that it is the beginning and end of life."

"It is, all right. But it's love of money and no other kind."

Robin did not reply. She let her gaze wander out of the window at the quaint tile-roofed houses of the little village through which they were traveling. But her eyes did not see the age-old barns, the peaceful cows chewing their cuds, the women piling hay in great stacks at the doorways, their feet in wooden shoes planted firmly

upon the moist earth. She saw a gray-eyed young man who had told her she was very pretty, and who had wanted so much to know her. Had he known all the time she was an heiress? She had told him her father was rich! Had that prompted him to give her his card and ask her to hunt him up in New York?

II

HAVRE. Bewildered, a little dazed, Robin was only too glad to let the yellow-haired girl summon a porter for her to take out her baggage. In return she spoke French to the man, who understood no English, and assisted her new friend in that manner.

During the inspection by the customs officials, Robin suddenly saw Derrick Conway, very red-faced and excited, and utterly uncomprehending what the man in uniform was demanding of him.

She forgot her shyness and pushed her way forward.

"May—I help you?" she stammered.

Derry turned. "Why — why, hello!" he exclaimed. "What brought you here?"

"I'm going to America, too."

"That's great! Yes, you *can* help me. I don't know what this chap is talking about."

"He wants to know if you have any gold in your possession."

"Tell him I haven't. Not a sou." He laughed gayly.

Robin explained to the official, who nodded and pushed Derry through a small door to the gangplank, and motioned the girl back into line. With a sinking in her heart she watched Derry's lithe figure in the smart English coat disappear. She wanted so much to talk to him, and another opportunity might not come again soon.

"Who's the boy friend?" asked the yellow-haired girl just behind her.

Robin's cheeks crimsoned. "Mr. Conway."

"Hem. He's some sheik. I hope he hasn't entangled your young affections."

Robin shrugged her shoulders in a characteristically French fashion that the pale hazel eyes noted with acute interest. When the official motioned to Robin to step inside the small room where examinations were made, she of the hazel eyes linked her arm in her new acquaintance's and entered also. Passports were duly stamped, and Robin heard the other's name. Lydia Craven. Then both girls were dismissed and permitted to go up on deck.

Here all was confusion. Passengers were running about wildly, looking for baggage, porters and staterooms. Americans were trying to express themselves in halting French or loud English; stewards were scurrying to and forth, chattering volubly in their own language; bags and suitcases and trunks, baskets of fruit and candy and flowers were piled on the deck irrespective of owners. Ladies in fur coats searched for the deck steward to engage chairs. One wildly clamored for the purser to change her room. An orchestra played in the music salon. Good-bys were said to friends and relatives upon the docks.

Robin stood alone on the promenade deck, feeling more friendless and miserable than she ever thought she could be. No one to wave good-by to her. No one to throw kisses. She looked about hoping to meet Derrick Conway's kind eyes, but he was nowhere in evidence.

A steward came forward and asked

the number of her stateroom. She told him, but declined to go below just at present; she felt if she was in a room, shut away from every one, she would burst into tears, and she was determined to fight them back.

Miss Craven had disappeared. Robin wished she had asked her the number of her stateroom. For all her cynical remarks, she had been friendly and seemed a good sort. Probably if she, herself, were poor she would be cynical also. It wasn't nice to be young and have to work in a department store and feel that no man would ever want to marry you because you had no money.

Jostled about by the passengers, Robin moved forward and stood looking over the railing at the deck below. There were chairs on it, also, and many carpet bags and rugs and suitcases. Also a great many small children. A tiny girl, not more than three years old was running about, crying, "Mamma! Mamma!" in a frightened voice. The child's terror caught at Robin's sympathetic heart.

She saw a door on the other side of the deck and a small stairway that led below. She opened the door and descended the stairs, and reached the baby just as, worn out with futile sobbing, it flung itself down and screamed lustily.

Robin caught the little one up in her arms and cradled the tousled head and wet face against her bosom, crooning softly.

AT that moment Derry stepped upon the deck. He had removed his swagger topcoat, and was in a blue sweater and plus fours. He came to Robin's side at once.

"We meet again," he said, and smiled in welcome.

"I heard the baby crying," she said. "I couldn't let the poor dear sob herself sick."

Derry looked at the lovely face pressed against the child's tangled curls and something caught at his throat. "You look like a Madonna."

"She *is* a pretty baby," Robin said, misunderstanding him. "Do you know where to find her mother?"

"Give her to the stewardess. She will find her." He beckoned to the woman and Robin relinquished her burden.

"Where is your stateroom?" she asked. "On the upper deck?"

Derry coughed, then answered frankly: "I'm traveling second class. You see, *my* father isn't wealthy."

"Oh." Just for a second Robin's eyes met his. A wicked little imp of suspicion lighted on her shoulder. He was a poor young man then! According to both madame and Lydia Craven, all poor young men were after rich wives. If she said that she was poor—

"My father," she stammered, "isn't wealthy, either." It was not an untruth, not exactly. Dennison Brent had not taken his riches with him into another world. "I am traveling first class, but I have just learned that—he died suddenly," she added with a little catch in her voice.

"And left you with nothing?" Derry's gray eyes gleamed. "I should say I'm sorry, but I'm not. Oh, I didn't mean that as crudely as it sounded, I beg your pardon. So that is why you are going to America?"

"Yes." Why did he look at her so strangely? Did he know she had lied to him? Or was he regretting that he had sought her acquaintance?

Trembling a little, Robin moved to the stairway. From the deck above she waved her hand at Derry, then went to find her cabin.

She encountered Lydia Craven in the corridor. The girl's eyes were black with anger, and her red lips set tightly. "Of all the nerve!" she ejaculated, upon seeing Robin. "Just because I'm a lone woman without some man to look after me they've given me the worst little box of a room you ever saw. I'm going to make that purser change it!"

Robin spoke timidly: "I have a room big enough for two—perhaps you would like to share it with me?"

"You haven't been to your cabin?"

The next moment an arm stole about her. "Lonely?" Derry whispered

"No. I've been busy. It's forty-four on A deck."

Lydia whistled. "That's a suite with a bath. You must have money. You aren't by any chance Dennison Brent's daughter, are you?"

"But I am," Robin answered modestly.

"And he's dead. That means—why,

you're worth millions!" Lydia's eyes narrowed. "No wonder you have a guardian! I can't understand their letting you travel alone. Every man Jack on board this ship will be after you. You'll have so many proposals when they learn who you are your head will swim. I'll say I'll share your stateroom with you! You need me."

Robin's brow furrowed; her lovely velvety eyes misted. "Do you really believe just because I am—rich—they will ask me to marry them? Don't you believe some one—just maybe one—might love me?"

"Forget the love thing, dearie. Come down to earth and look facts in the face. You're pretty and you're sweet, but you're old-fashioned. Your clothes are duds. You haven't any style. Men want snap and style and money in a woman. Lacking the first two you supply the third. Some one might love you, but it's dollars to doughnuts your money will attract in the first place."

LYDIA linked her arm in Robin's and led the way down the corridor. The door to 44 was open. Robin's trunk and bags were inside, and two huge vases of flowers. She gave a little cry of delight when she saw the roses.

"How lovely! Why, look, Miss Craven, the captain sent them to me—and the purser."

"Sure," drawled Lydia, surveying all the luxury about her. "Why not? You'll be the prize passenger of the ship." She sat down on one of the twin beds, her curiously light eyes more than half reading the other girl's troubled thoughts. "But why be unhappy about it? I wouldn't mind attention and flowers and a good time even if I had to buy them. Take what the gods provide and to—"

Robin's chin quivered. "I love flowers. I think I'd like a good time, as other girls have them, but I'd be miserable to have a man want to marry me just because I have all that money."

"You aren't by any chance in love, are you?" Lydia's jetty lashes hid the expression in her eyes.

"I don't know. I like some one very much. He said I was pretty and he seemed to like me, but maybe—"

"The boy we met on the docks?"

"Yes." Robin's head drooped. She felt very much embarrassed, tongue-tied.

"Does he know you're Dennison Brent's heiress?"

"No. He doesn't know my name. That's why—I can't believe all men want money. He said I was pretty and that he wanted to know me, and I never told him my name."

Lydia flung herself back on the bed with a burst of laughter. "Lord! You're innocent. If he didn't know who you were two hours ago he will before we are out to sea very long. Unless—you think he is keen about you, don't you?"

"I don't know what you mean?"

"You think he likes you a lot?"

"I hope so."

"Why don't you test him? Of course every one on board knows by now that Dennison Brent's heiress is on the ship, but they don't know yet that you are she. Suppose—suppose you pretend to be Lydia Craven and I pretend to be you!"

"You mean—"

"Exactly. I'd get an awful kick out of being kowtowed to for a week, and maybe might wangle a proposal out of some one. I don't care how I get it, and you can see if men do love poor girls."

"Would it be honest?" Robin demurred.

"As honest as men will be with you. No one has sized us as yet; we can put it over easily."

Robin hesitated. Her position as an heiress, the deference she would receive, meant little to her. She had always lived simply, hedged about with the shadows of an impending tragedy. She had never known luxury, nor companionship, and with all her ardent hungry soul she desired love. Still, Lydia's proposition rather shocked her. Suppose Derrick Conway really fell in love with her, what would his reaction be to her deception? On the other hand, suppose he was as Lydia claimed all men were, a fortune hunter? Madame had said practically the same thing and begged her never to fall in love. And this girl—who desired marriage—

"If I lent you my name," she said tremulously, "it would help you?"

"I'll say so, a lot. Only a week of playing at heiress and watch me. You haven't a thing to lose by it, and I've the whole world to gain."

"All right. You must post me though, I'm very stupid."

III

IT was all very simple. Lydia rang for a steward and in a most dignified manner, that made Robin laugh in spite of herself, declared her trunk had been placed in the wrong room, but that Miss Craven would remain with her. Later, in a black satin evening gown cut very low in the back, she descended to the office of the chief steward and secured seats at the captain's table for herself and friend, Miss Craven. At dinner she thanked the captain for the flowers he had sent, eschewed all her slang and played the lady to the manor born.

Robin's timidity aided in the deception. Her quaint, old-fashioned frock appeared shabby beside Lydia's, and as no one addressed any remarks to her, but hung upon all that Lydia said, she remained in the background.

Later, when there was dancing in the lounge, Robin slipped away, but not before she had seen Lydia claimed by several young men as partner. So far, her roommate's statements were proving correct, and Robin's heart was heavy.

With a shawl wrapped about her slender shoulders, she strolled the deck a few moments, then lingered over the railing above the second-class deck. They were dancing there also. Some one possessed a victrola and it was grinding out a love waltz. Under the star-dotted skies three couples were whirling to the music. Robin could not see their faces, but the long, lithe limbs of one young man reminded her very much of Derrick. She wished with all her soul she could go below and be held tightly in his arms. She could not dance, but with his arms to guide her she knew that she could learn.

Unaware that a light overhead outlined her delicate features, she rested her chin in her cupped palms and watched the merry-makers. The music ceased. Some one laughed; then the couples separated. One young man sprinted up the narrow staircase, opened the door and crossed to Robin's side.

The next moment an arm found its way about her shoulders.

"Lonely?" Derry whispered.

Robin whirled. Her head was swimming and the lump in her throat made it impossible for her to answer.

"I saw you," he continued huskily.

"Gee, I wish you'd come down and dance with us."

"I wish I could, too, but—"

"I know. If I'd dreamed you were going to be on this ship I'd have taken first-class passage if it broke me. Now I haven't enough money with me to change, but maybe— Are you afraid to come down?"

"Yes," she answered shyly. She was afraid—afraid of the sweet, strange emotions that set her blood to tingling, that made her forget madame's admonitions, Lydia Craven's cynical philosophy.

"I'm crazy about you," he said hoarsely, drawing her into his embrace. "And I don't even know your name."

A chill fell over Robin. The sudden flame that had kindled in her at his touch died under the ice of suspicion. She moved quickly out of his arms. "I—I am Lydia Craven," she said.

He laughed nervously. "Do you know, for one moment I was afraid you were going to say your name was Robin Brent?"

"Then you've heard of her?"

"Sure, every one knows she's on board. She's as rich as Crœsus and traveling alone."

"She isn't traveling alone," Robin said stiffly. "She is traveling with me."

"What!"

"I mean—that we are—we share the same room. I'm sort of a companion. Good night, Mr. Conway." She started to move away.

"Wait!" he called.

But Robin would not look back. He had thought she might be the heiress! He had said he was crazy about her and then had asked her name! If Lydia was right, she didn't care whether she lived or died. She loved him, and she didn't know whether he was a fortune hunter or not!

ROBIN slept little that night. She lay on her bed wide-eyed and motionless, listening to Lydia's quiet breathing, to the swish of the waves against the sides of the vessel, to the chug-chug of the mighty engine that was carrying her to her new home and new life. One moment she would bitterly regret not having told Derrick who she was; the next moment she would be glad of her lie. Her heart was bitter at having learned some of life's lessons. She genuinely wished she was but a poor girl, and that if love were ever offered her she could accept it without questioning.

During the long, lazy days that followed she learned much more. She saw the cabin full of flowers and gifts bestowed upon Lydia by admirers who addressed her as Miss Brent. She saw Lydia become the most popular girl on board. She saw her surrounded and courted by young men, old men and boys, paid deference by women, while she herself was ignored. And her heart sickened.

Though daily she had glimpses of Derrick on the deck below and he always waved to her, or begged her to join him or just come to the stair landing, she always avoided him. Ugly suspicion, mixed with fear, guided her against the promptings of her heart, a heart that argued Derry believed her to be a poor girl, yet sought her. Her suspicions informed her that he knew quite well who she was and for that reason wanted to know her better.

During this time Lydia, who was enjoying her popularity hugely, gleaned much information from her little roommate. All that Robin knew about her-

self she told the other girl, never dreaming that Lydia had a sinister motive behind her questions. Robin told her of the quiet, dark old house in Passy, of Madame Angèle who had been nurse and mother to her for years, of Nanette the maid, and Mr. Thompson the tutor. She told of her father's rare visits, how she had never really known him, of the checks that had come monthly from America through Shelby Landon who lived on Park Avenue and had an office down town in New York. That her father had lived on Madison Avenue and that she supposed she would live there also.

Lydia's yellow eyes would narrow and her delicate nostrils quiver when Robin spoke of going among total strangers who had never seen her, and how she dreaded meeting Shelby Landon, how she wondered what sort of a guardian he would be.

Robin did not know that everything she said to Lydia was carefully tabulated in a little notebook; that every gesture she made was studied by the other, that every word she uttered was repeated by Lydia when alone. Too engrossed in her own uncertainty to notice that Lydia had begun to comb her hair as she wore hers, Robin did not see how slowly, but surely, Miss Craven was developing a likeness to her. Gone was the mass of artificial curls. In some manner the brassy gold of Lydia's hair grew paler until it shone with the soft, silvery gleam of Robin's flaxen coil.

Robin's hair had a natural undulation. When parted in the center, as she always wore it, it fell in a thick wave over her ears and forehead. Lydia's did the same, now. Slowly rouge disappeared and Lydia's cheeks became pale, not with the faint flush of youth but with a pallor that was intriguing. At times she borrowed a frock of Robin's—Robin was only too glad to lend them—and looked almost as young as its owner, though she admitted she was of age.

They compared passports. In this manner Lydia knew where Robin kept her letters of identification, her money and her few mementoes of her dead mother. Lydia was clever. She had always been lucky. She trusted to that luck to aid her in the biggest, most daring act of her life.

And little shy Robin, feeling that this girl was her only friend, played directly into her hand. She invited Lydia to come and live with her in New York, listened to all her unwholesome advice, and tried to stifle the new sweet throbbing in her heart every time she thought of Derrick.

DERRY was not a patient lover, nor was he shy. Years of battling against all odds to earn a living had given him confidence in himself. There had been several girls who had been ready to marry him had he given them a thought, and he had recognized budding love in Robin's blushes, in her slow, sweet smile and the darkening of her beautiful eyes. He knew that first day on the Bois that she was the one woman in all the world for him, and he was romantic enough to believe one could not love wholly without that love being reciprocated. The meeting upon the docks had confirmed his first impressions. If Robin did not love him yet, she would in time. What had occurred to make her avoid him was something he could not fathom.

Day and night he puzzled over her attitude. Hourly he thought of her, and cursed the class distinction that separated them. It wasn't the fact that

he was traveling second class, he was certain. She had said she was poor; hence his poverty was no barrier. Some outside influence had been brought to bear to change her. He was going to find out what that influence was.

The night before the Verna was to steam into New York harbor, Derry boldly donned an evening suit, pushed aside the sailor standing by the door, and stepped upon the promenade deck. There were several passengers sitting in deck chairs, swathed in heavy rugs; beyond them, leaning on the railing, watching the trail of foam on the dark sea, stood Robin. He walked deliberately to her side, and before she could protest, slipped his hand under her elbow and drew her out of the line of vision of the others.

"I've tried every way to get a word with you," he said tensely. "And I want to know what's the matter?"

"Matter?" Robin's heart beat so hard she was certain he must hear it.

"Yes. Oh, I know it's against the rules for me to come up here, but there's no reason why you have to refuse to speak to me when you see me, unless you're a snob."

"I'm not a snob," indignantly.

"I know you aren't. Then what have I done? What have they said about me?"

"Nothing." Her voice was choked.

"Of course you don't know anything about me, but that's what I wanted to tell you. I'm clean, I'm honest, and I've dandy prospects. I haven't much as yet, but I will have, and I can at least take care of a wife comfortably, and—"

"Wife!" Robin's body seemed bathed in flame. She trembled violently.

"I told you I was crazy about you. I am. I want you. I want to carry you away from every one and everything. But I'll try to be sensible. I'll give you time to become acquainted with me, but I'm going to marry you, darling, and there is nothing you can say or do that will prevent me. Sweetheart, don't you care a little — don't you think you could learn to love me, to want to be my wife?"

"I love you now," she whispered, everything that madame and Lydia had said forgotten. "Oh, I love you so much. I've been so unhappy, thinking you didn't love me."

His arms held her close; his lips found hers, drank their sweetness. "Why should you think I didn't love you?" he whispered. "I told you I did."

"I know," with her cheek against his. "But there's no reason you should love me."

"Every reason in the world. You're beautiful; you're sweet and lovely; you're — you're all I want in a girl. That's reason enough for me."

"But I told you," she began in confusion, "that I was poor, and—"

"And I'm thankful," he interrupted. "What would I do with a rich wife? I want to support the girl I marry. I want to give her things she has never had before. I want her to look to me for protection. If you were rich I'd love you—I couldn't help myself—but I'd never have asked you to marry me. No, I've too much pride for that—and I've seen too many marriages of that kind go on the rocks."

Robin shivered. This was different from anything that Lydia had said. Was money always to be the barrier to her happiness? She would not let it be. She couldn't tell him who she was now. Not when she had just discovered that there was real romance, real love in the world. No, she was Derry's,

he was hers, and nothing must ruin their happiness. She would ask Lydia's advice before she told Derry the truth. Lydia would know what to do.

toward them through the heavy, impenetrable vapor that obscured lights and sea and clouds.

"You're cold, darling," Derry said

Lydia had her passport and her father's picture in her hand!

Locked in each other's arms, drunk with the sweetest intoxicant in life, neither heard the sinister warning that the fog horns had been sounding for the past hour; neither dreamed that a menace to life and love was heading

suddenly. "I'm a brute to keep you out here. I'll manage to see you again before we dock, then afterward there won't be anything on earth to keep us apart."

"Nothing," she answered. He kissed

her lingeringly, and walked with her to the hatch, then went briskly toward the little door that had hitherto shut him out of paradise.

Robin was singing softly as she descended the stairs to her cabin. The little song died on her lips as she opened the door. Lydia was there, bending over *her* suitcase with *her* passport and *her* father's picture in her hand, and Robin would have had to be a great deal more innocent than she was not to have recognized what her roommate was doing. But the words she intended to say were never uttered.

A tremendous crash shook the vessel; it lurched like a drunken thing and flung Robin across the room. She lost her balance and fell, striking her head against the iron footboard of her bed. There she lay, stunned and unconscious.

THERE were shrieks and curses and moans. Prayers for mercy, sobs of terror, the shrill warning whistle of steamships, fog horns, the tramping of feet, the gush of water.

Lydia, white-faced and terrified, stared down at the girl who had caught her in her act of theft; stared there with Robin's papers of identification in her hands while she hesitated whether to save the life of one who had befriended her, or, like the vile thing she knew herself to be, leave her to die like a little animal in a trap. Greed mastered her, even in the face of death. She snatched up Robin's suitcase and her fur coat, thrust the passport and papers in her bosom, and struggled to the deck above, clinging to the staircase railing, as the ship careened like a tub, and slowly listed to one side.

There was pandemonium on deck. Mothers with sobbing children were shrieking for assistance. Men were struggling past sailors and officers. Boats were being lowered. Families, separated from each other, were trying to find loved ones. With the collision most of the lights had been extinguished, and only oil lamps illuminated the horror that was taking place.

"She's sinking! God! Are they going to let us drown without a chance?" moaned a man.

"My baby! My baby is in the cabin! For God's sake save her!"

Lydia stumbled upon an inert figure upon the deck. She shuddered and drew up against the railing. Moans, anguished groans from the injured. Scraps of conversation. "She jammed into a freighter!" "The fog!"

Sinking! The ship was sinking. She found herself pushed into line between a stout man and a little woman who sobbed hysterically.

"Women and children first!" The stout man, cursing, swearing he was needed in Wall Street, was shoved back and the girl thrust forward, into a lifeboat that swung perilously over the black water, then, with a creak of steel ropes, was lowered.

Lydia drew a deep breath. Saved! And if Robin perished, there was nothing on earth to prevent her from obtaining that fortune. Luck was with her!

IV

COLD water splashing in her face restored Robin's consciousness.

She struggled to a sitting posture to realize that the cabin was in total darkness, and that the floor was covered an inch deep with water. Her skirts clung to her in soggy folds; her head was splitting from the blow she had received in falling.

For a moment she was too dazed to wonder what had occurred, then with memory came the picture of Lydia, with *her* passport, bending over *her* suitcase, Lydia, whom she had trusted. Then the crash. Something terrible had happened.

She managed to rise, and, feeling her way with outstretched hands, reached the door. It would not open. She discovered that one of the wardrobes had fallen against it and had pinioned it shut. With all her strength, sobbing softly in her terror, she tugged at the obstacle. Now and then she lost her footing and slipped down into the water, but again and again she rose.

To drown like this!

She heard the cries above, the tramping of feet and creaking of ropes, then some one in the corridor calling: "Lydia! Lydia!" At first it did not occur to her that the person was seeking her, but she answered: "Help! Help! I'm locked in here! Forty-four! Help!"

Some one pounded on her door, kicked it, beat at it. Then she recognized Derry's frantic voice: "Lydia! Lydia, are you there?" She sobbed: "Yes! Yes!" and tugged harder at the wardrobe. It yielded at last, and he pushed the door open enough to struggle through.

"Thank God!" he sobbed, unashamed, gathering her in his arms. "I'd almost given up hopes of finding you."

He lifted her in his arms and carried her up the swaying stairs. She was limp and weak, and lay in his embrace as helpless as a child. She did not hear him tell her that the ship was sinking, and that there was only one chance that they could reach the last boat before the vessel found a watery grave.

All during that long, perilous night, while the fog horns sounded in the distance, and the black, angry sea flung billows of foam over the side of the little motor boat, Robin lay in Derry's arms, too ill physically to wonder what had become of Lydia, her own possessions or her future. She had seen the great dark body of the Verna disappear; had seen the freighter turn over on one side and vanish. Her straining eyes had glimpsed the white specks of other lifeboats, and her ears had heard prayers of thanksgiving, but her thanksgiving was because she was in Derry's arms.

Nothing else mattered.

Daylight found the derelicts close to New York harbor. Already some of the boats had been rescued and their bedraggled, woebegone passengers had been passed through the custom house and turned over to their frantic relations. Among those passengers was Lydia, self-assertive and sure that Robin had perished.

With one of Derry's handkerchiefs bound about her wounded head, Robin hung on his arm while he answered the questions put to them. Derry had his passport in his pocket, and consequently experienced no annoyance, but Robin was without papers of any kind. Very pale, her fleece of gold hanging about her shoulders, her frock in ribbons and hanging in wet folds about her slender limbs, she looked less than her years.

"What's your name? Where were you born?"

"Robin Brent," she answered without hesitation. "I was born in Paris, but my parents—"

She did not see Derry start, but the expression on the face of the questioning official frightened her. "That doesn't go! Miss Robin Brent left

here ten minutes ago with her guardian. I know him, and he identified her, which wasn't necessary, really, as she had her papers. Come on, what's your name?"

"My name is really—" Robin began, but Derry interrupted her.

"She has been injured, officer," he said, "and is probably too dazed to tell you, but I can. She is Miss Brent's companion, Lydia Craven. American."

The officer scowled, looked at Derry's passport, then grunted: "All right, Mr. Conway, if you vouch for her."

In the taxicab Robin said slowly, "I really am Robin Brent, Derry. I told that man the truth."

DERRY drew her head to his shoulder and rested his lips upon her hair. "Don't talk now, darling. You are ill, and must not think about anything until I can get you to a doctor."

"I'm not so ill I don't know what I am saying," she persisted. "I tried to tell you this evening after you asked me to marry you, but I couldn't — I was afraid you wouldn't want me— that you would be angry. But you must know the truth. I am an heiress, and—"

He looked at her then, and saw the truth in her eyes. "Why," he gasped, "did you lie to me then? You said you were Lydia Craven, that— Who is Lydia Craven? Why did you masquerade as some one else?"

Falteringly Robin told him of her meeting with the hazel-eyed girl, of Lydia's suggestion that they change identities, of her insistence that no one would love an heiress for anything but her money. With crimson cheeks she confessed to the test through which she had put him.

But Derrick was not thinking of the insult to his manhood; his mind instantly grasped the gigantic plan of the adventuress who had won Robin's confidence.

"Don't you see? She had the idea from the moment she met you and learned you were alone. She intended to steal your passport and rob you! Good Lord, what a scheme! And the accident worked in her favor. She left you to die. But for me finding you— What a fiend! We must find your guardian at once and secure your papers before she has a chance to do any more damage!"

Robin was too grateful to him for not being angry at her to think of what this knowledge must mean to him. She nestled against his shoulder unconscious of the scowl on his forehead, and that his arm no longer held her so tightly. After a few moments he asked her where her guardian lived and where her father's home was. She gave him Shelby Landon's office address, and he directed the driver to take them there.

To the little girl used to the wide boulevards and leafy avenues of the Bois du Boulogne, Broadway was bewildering and terrifying; the down town district of New York, with its narrow caverns between skyscrapers higher than her imagination had ever conceived, startled her out of her anxiety for her future. Her hand feverishly grasped Derrick's, while she stared with interest about her. Everything was so different here.

They found the building where the attorney had his office and were shot up in the elevator. Robin's eyes were like stars, her lips parted as they walked down the corridor, then pushed open a door with "Landon and Breen" in stenciled letters upon its glass panel.

"Mr. Landon isn't in," a girl at the switchboard informed them. "He went to the boat to see his ward come in, and then over to the Cunard docks. He's sailing for Havana today."

"Havana!" gasped Derrick.

"Yes." Her insolent eyes swept over the pair, neither one particularly presentable in the clothing they had worn all night in the open boat, Robin with her golden fleece hanging about her shoulders, her dress in creases, still damp; Derrick most untidy, his hair rough, his cheeks unshaven.

"What time does this boat sail?" the young man asked tensely.

"It's sailed. He phoned up that the passengers from the Verna had all come in safely, Miss Brent—that's his ward—among them and that he could catch his ship if he hurried. The Verna was in a collision, you know."

"Yes," Derry mumbled, "I know. We were on her." What use to explain to this girl that Robin was the real Miss Brent? "Can you tell me where to reach Mr. Landon in Havana?"

The girl smiled. "We aren't supposed to tell that. Mr. Breen is out to lunch or you might ask him if he knows."

"Don't *you* know?" Derry demanded.

"No, I don't."

Derry looked into Robin's troubled eyes. "There's no use waiting here, dear. You must get to a hotel and change your clothing. I'll come back later and see Mr. Breen."

Neither spoke until they reached the street; then Robin said: "I'd rather go to the house on Madison Avenue first. It's my home now. She has no right there, and she shan't stay."

"You may have some trouble," he answered, "but if you feel equal to it now I'm ready to go with you."

She pressed his hand in gratitude.

V

THE Brent home was a stately old mansion built in the days when Madison Avenue was a smart residential section of New York. It was surrounded by a brick wall, now covered with dead ivy vines. The house itself was gray stone, with a wide veranda that rambled around four sides. Deep French windows and heavy carved oak doors opened upon the porticoes. There was a grilled iron gate in the wall that opened into a driveway.

The gate was locked, but Derry found a bell and pressed it. The gate swung open and he and Robin walked up a short pebbled path to three steps that led to the front door. There Derry pulled a brass knocker.

Robin was trembling. This was her home. This was where the strange man who had been her father had lived and died; where he had brought his young bride. Why had they deserted her and left her alone all those years in Paris to the care of strangers? Now she was begging for admittance at the portals, when by rights they should swing open to welcome her. What was the mystery that had surrounded her all her life, the mystery that had made possible Lydia Craven's theft of her identity?

The great oak door swung open and an old man faced them. He was white-haired and bent, and his dark, drab livery hung about his gaunt frame in loose, ugly folds. He blinked at them near-sightedly under his thatch of snowy hair and kept the door ajar.

"There is a young lady—" Derry began.

"Miss Brent cannot see any one," said the old butler. "She is ill."

"But I must see her!" Robin cried. She tried to enter the house, but before she could do so the door was slammed in her face.

Derry whistled. "I'm afraid we are in for real trouble," he said. Robin's cheeks were crimson with anger. Until this moment her inheritance had meant little to her, but now standing upon the ground that was her own, she was determined to fight for it.

"She shan't take my place!" she cried. "Ring again."

Again and again Derry pulled at the knocker. There was no response. They went around to the side of the house and found another door. Derry knocked upon it, and at last a woman, as white of hair and as aged as the butler, appeared. Her black eyes were snapping and every tense muscle of her angular body expressed indignation. "If you don't go away," she exclaimed, "I'll call the police. Parker told me about you, and you shan't be permitted to disturb us."

"That settles it," said Derry as the second door was slammed. "We could go to the police ourselves, but without a scrap of paper to prove your identity, and without a rag to your back, they'd laugh at our story. The best thing for you to do is to find a boarding house for the time being, and I'll think up what's to be done."

"I haven't any money," Robin wailed. "I haven't anything!"

"Well, I have," he answered grimly. "The place where I board may be pretty poor after what you're used to, but I'm going to take you there. It's a shelter, anyway, where you can rest and sleep, and I don't want you to worry about money, not while you have me."

"Won't I always have you?" Robin asked timidly. Suddenly she was very weary. Nothing mattered but Derry's love. She wanted him to say, "Come, darling, we will be married and forget this fortune."

He looked down at her little pale face, a tender glow in his gray eyes. "You will always have my *love*," he said. Something in the tone of his voice made Robin shiver. His *love!* She wanted that, but she wanted his name, she wanted *him*. Did that mean he was going to let her fortune come between them? But she had no fortune now. She hadn't even her own name. No, he was just tired and worried.

They took another taxi and drove uptown. At Eightieth Street Derry dismissed the cab, and went into a drugstore to telephone his landlady. "I want to explain to her why you have no baggage," he informed Robin, "and to have her prepare a room for you before we arrive."

DERRY'S boarding house was a few doors off of Broadway, a brownstone house that had once been a residence. Mrs. Lemen met them at the door. She was a fat, comfortable soul who belied her name. One glance at Robin's tragic little face and she took her in her arms.

"I'm sorry I haven't a decent room to give you, dearie, only the top floor rear, but it's comfortable and quiet, and I guess that's what you need most."

Robin thanked her and followed her up four flights of stairs to the tiniest room she had ever seen. But it was clean, the bed was white and soft, and the one window looked out upon a little garden.

"I'll send Petunia up with a tray," Mrs. Lemen said. "Just you get your clothes off and climb into bed. Mr.

Conway will call you in time for dinner."

Robin was too tired to do anything but what she was ordered. Two lingerie and a simple dark frock. Robin thanked him with tears in her eyes and proceeded to don them. How thoughtful he was! No wonder she loved him

And then she was being introduced to the lady with the sad eyes

minutes after her head hit the pillow she was sound asleep.

Derry knocked on her door at five-thirty. "Are you dressed, dear?" he asked. "If not just put your hand outside, I've something for you."

She opened the door a crack.

The something proved to be a long box which contained a change of so her heart seemed ready to burst when she thought of him.

Derry waited in the hall until she was dressed, then when she opened the door and greeted him shyly he stepped inside.

"I have been busy, sweetheart," he said, after kissing her and commenting upon how well she looked in the new

gown, " and after dinner you are going to meet a friend of mine, Tad Hooley. Tad used to be a detective; now he is a criminal investigator, one of the biggest in New York. I've told him all about this Craven woman and what has happened, and he wants to see you."

On the way downstairs to the basement, where Mrs. Lemen had established her dining room, Derry informed Robin that Hooley had thought it advisable for her to keep silent about her identity and everything that had happened until they knew what line to pursue. Mrs. Lemen gave them a small table for two in a corner, so Robin was not compelled to meet any of the other boarders.

At seven o'clock Tad Hooley arrived, and was shown into the parlor, a shabby little room on the first floor, with double doors opening into the hallway. At Derry's request the landlady promised them privacy. Hooley was a big, broad-shouldered man of thirty-five, with carrot-red hair, keen brown eyes and an unctuous personality. He put Robin at ease at once.

" Now, Miss Brent," he said, sitting upon a sofa that threatened to collapse with his weight, " I want the whole low-down."

Robin told him everything, beginning with her meeting with Lydia, and what had occurred on the ship.

" You never met your father's attorney, I suppose? Nor any of his servants?"

" No."

" Then it would be useless to get in touch with Shelby Landon until we have some means to establish your identity. Only Madame Angèle can do that, and you say she is too old and ill to come to New York?"

" Yes."

" Did you ever ask her why your parents kept you in France?"

Robin's brown eyes clouded. " My mother died when I was small, and I always felt that my father never loved me. Madame would never talk about him or anything regarding myself."

" I see." Hooley folded his freckled hands and cogitated. Then he said to Derrick: " You know this is a pretty tough nut to crack. You've a clever woman to cope with, and possession is nine points of the law. Neither of you has money or we'd start legal proceedings—my only advice is to fight guile with guile. I don't know how much of an actress you are, Miss Brent, but most women have some ability that way, and, luckily, Derry here is a good-looking chap. It's a cinch the lady Craven won't stay long in retirement, if for no other reason than to bluff her way through. I believe for the time being it would be advisable to lie low and watch for her to make the first move, not even try to get in touch with Landon."

" But I haven't any money at all," said Robin, " and I'm an absolute stranger in New York!"

" EVERY penny I possess is yours to command," Derry said earnestly.

Hooley laughed. " And how much is that? Two hundred dollars?"

Derry colored. " Enough to keep Robin from starving, anyway."

" I propose to put her to work."

" Work?" The girl's lovely lips parted. " Could I work?"

" Why not? I don't mean in a shop, but at something where your knowledge of French and your culture will be of use. And while we are playing a waiting game, the Craven woman will lose her alertness and not look for

trouble. I have a client, a Mrs. Stewart, who wants a companion. She is a very charming lady, not yet middle-aged, who has suffered greatly and has lost hope. Now she desires the companionship of a young girl who may compensate her for losing her child."

Briefly, under the seal of secrecy, Hooley gave them the strange history of his client. Many years before, when a bride, Nancy Stewart had accompanied her husband to Havana, where they intended to spend the winter months. Her child, a lovely little girl, was born there. In those days, Mrs. Stewart was gay and pleasure-loving. The Cuban capital offered much to divert her. Every night there were balls and parties, the casino with its roulette wheels to draw her away from the home young Stewart had furnished in Vedada. Little Louise, three months old, was left to the care of a nurse who seemed to adore her. One night Mrs. Stewart returned to her home to find Mequilla, the nurse, in tears and almost insane with anxiety. Mequilla had gone into the *patio* to speak with a friend, and when she returned the baby was not in her crib.

Instantly Nancy Stewart thought of a servant, Elfredo, whom she had dismissed the day before when she had found him in her boudoir with her purse in his hands. The police had been summoned, but Elfredo and her baby had vanished as though the earth had opened up and swallowed them. For months every nook and cranny of Havana and the surrounding islands had been searched, all of Cuba, in fact. Then the heartbroken parents had returned to New York and had engaged detectives there. Years passed. John Stewart died, but his widow carried on the search, growing more hopeless each year. Now Hooley was on the case.

"There isn't a chance the girl will ever be found," he added. "And I have frankly said as much to Mrs. Stewart. I feel guilty at accepting money from her. Probably the scoundrel murdered the baby and fled to Europe. It is so long ago, and there are no clews. I have tried to convince the poor woman she should forget the child and get some happiness out of life.

"She is just beginning to be reconciled to the idea and has at last decided to employ a young girl to keep her company. I think you, Miss Brent, will be a godsend to her."

"Poor woman," murmured Robin. "If she will hire me I shall be so grateful to live with her."

"To-morrow I will have you meet her. I'll tell her the truth about you, and perhaps if she grows fond of you she may assist you to reinstate yourself. Derry's position we will outline later."

There was a strange look on Derry's face. But he pressed Robin's hand tenderly and smiled at her. "Well, this settles our troubles for the present," he said, "for when Mrs. Stewart sees Robin she is sure to want her. Personally, I'd like to go over to the house on Madison Avenue and take that adventuress by the throat and choke the life out of her."

Hooley laughed. "Which would land you in jail and not help Miss Brent a particle! Suppose, Miss Brent, you come to my office at ten to-morrow morning?"

"I shall be glad to."

VI

TAD HOOLEY'S office was in the same building where Derry was employed. Robin rode down-town in a street car with Derry and received

some instructions upon how to find her way about in the city. There was a constraint between them that nothing could overcome. Derry was as tender, as solicitous and considerate as before, but Robin felt the change in him. With all her heart and soul she longed to say to him, "Derry, if you have money enough to care for me, let us get married and forget my fortune. Nothing matters but our love. I can work to help you until we can get started." But she was not modern enough to do this, and she suffered in silence and began to loathe the inheritance for which Derry was determined to fight and which would separate them.

The young man, studying her lovely pale face, never worshipped her more than at the time when he renounced her and braced himself for the hour when she would pass out of his life. He had made no vain remarks. He was not the man to marry a woman of wealth. False pride or not, he would never be beholden to any woman. Once Robin was instated in her own home and the mistress of her fortune, he intended to bid her farewell, though he would love her always. But until that time came she was his, and his protection surrounded her.

Not wishing to introduce her under an assumed name to any of the men employed in his office, and not daring to give her own, they parted in the hallway. Then Robin descended to a floor below to meet Mrs. Stewart and Derry went in to look over his mail.

There was a press clipping bureau connected with his advertising agency and one of the first clippings he read concerned Robin Brent. The papers all carried the news of her arrival in America after having been miraculously saved from death in the wreck of the Verna. The clipping went on to state that Miss Brent was ill from shock, but as soon as a suitable time had elapsed after her father's death she intended to open the old house on Madison Avenue and welcome the friendship of the persons who had known her father.

Derry whistled. Lydia Craven *was* clever. Naturally she did not know who had or had not been friends of the late Dennison Brent and she would use this method to ascertain. She had never seen *him*. If he played his cards well, he could gain entrée to the house. He would watch for the announcement of her social activities.

WHEN Robin timidly entered Tad Hooley's office she found him closeted with a white-haired lady whose pale face and classic features showed the remains of great beauty. She was elegantly but somberly clad in black velvet, with a pointed fox scarf thrown about her slender shoulders. Her slim white fingers were ringless, but an exquisite rope of pearls was twined about her neck and the soft lace at her throat held a large pear-shaped diamond in a pin of pearls and platinum.

Hooley sprang to his feet at Robin's entrance, and the white-haired lady turned and looked at the girl through a jeweled lorgnette, but not in a disconcerting manner.

"Mrs. Stewart," Hooley said, taking Robin's hand, "this is the young lady of whom I told you, Miss Robin Brent."

Mrs. Stewart extended her hand. "My dear," she said, "I have heard of your father and his death, though unfortunately I never knew either him nor your mother or I might be of some assistance in establishing your claim to his fortune."

"You believe I am Robin Brent?" the girl asked eagerly.

The soft gray eyes smiled. "Certainly. I have lived long enough to recognize truth when I see it. My kind friend Mr. Hooley believes your story, and he is a shrewd man. But belief and proof are two different matters. I think you are very wise to seek employment until your identity can be proven. Mr. Hooley has told you I wish a companion?"

"Oh, yes."

"I want a young girl who will accompany me to the theater, read to me, talk with me, and"—the sweet mouth quivered—"give me the attention my own child, if I had one, would give to me. Would you like such a position?"

"Oh, yes." Robin's heart went out to her at once.

"Mr. Hooley tells me your trunks and all your belongings went down with the vessel, so no doubt you are in need of money." She opened her purse and drew out a roll of bills. "This will be an advance in salary. I would like to have you come to me by Monday. Can you do so?"

"Yes," Robin answered, wondering that she did not feel embarrassed at taking the money. They discussed salary and hours, then Mrs. Stewart shook her hand, wrapped her fox scarf about her throat and left the office.

"That's immense!" Hooley exclaimed boisterously. "We'll have to phone Derry and tell him the good news. I'll ask him to join us at luncheon."

At Childs, over wheat cakes and coffee, a new dish to the little Paris-bred girl, Derry showed the detective the clippings regarding Robin Brent, and together they laid plans for the future, but all the time the girl's heart sank lower. Derry seemed to be thinking only of her fortune, nothing at all about their love.

At last she mustered up enough courage to ask him if he still loved her, and his reply made her happier. "You know I do, darling; better than anything in this world; whatever happens, never doubt that I do."

VII

MEANWHILE Lydia Craven had taken full possession of the house on Madison Avenue. Exercising all the charm that she could command, she had insinuated herself into the graces of the family retainers, old Rogers, the housekeeper; Parker, the butler; West, the chauffeur, and the two maids, Sarah and Myrtle. Rogers respected her apparent grief, and Lydia won her heart.

After accompanying her to her home, Shelby Landon had given her a check book on a Fifth Avenue bank, and two thousand dollars in cash. Since the real Robin's signature was unknown, Lydia had no fear to cash checks, but she had taken the precaution to send Rogers to the bank for money. She intended to remain in seclusion until her position was safer. There was no doubt in her mind that the woman who had called upon her the day of her arrival was Robin, and she fancied the man had been a lawyer.

She realized what a dangerous game she was playing, and hoped by the time Robin's eighteenth birthday had rolled around to have her hands on her fortune, then to slip quietly out of the city and disappear. Landon's trip to Havana suited her perfectly.

Over the telephone she had an orgy of shopping. Girls from various modistes' shops came with boxes of imported gowns, coats, and lingerie. These Lydia placed in a cedar closet

to be worn when the period of mourning was over; meanwhile she dressed in well-chosen filmy frocks of black.

"Not real mourning," she explained to Rogers. "I never really knew my father, and I would be a hypocrite to pretend I am grieving over him; but I must concede something to convention."

But for all the luxury surrounding her, Lydia was bored. Paneled walls, exquisite furnishings, oil paintings, a boudoir of her own, all the perfume and toilet articles and beautiful frocks she could desire, could not take the place of the excitement upon which she had lived. Daily drives in the black limousine that Dennison Brent had always used were small compensation for the long hours spent in the dreary library trying to read, when books made her yawn and fret at confinement.

Several men came to call, elderly men who had been Brent's business associates, but she was afraid to meet them. A letter arrived from Madame Angèle, which she opened and puzzled how to answer. She could not read the French in which it was written; she dared not risk using her own penmanship to reply, yet if it remained unanswered, Madame Angèle might write to Landon to find out what had occurred. She decided to study French, and secured a personal maid, a French girl, Sylvie, who knew no English, and could not talk to the other servants. She knew enough of the language to make herself understood, and she had Sylvie answer the letter for her and tell Madame Angèle she had hurt her arm in the crash so could not write, herself.

So a month went by. She breathed more easily; ventured to the bank, to the theater, driving in the car; and now and then she visited the department stores. Having heard nothing of Robin, she concluded the girl had accepted her situation, married her poor young man, and was content to give up her fortune.

Then Shelby Landon returned from Havana. He was an elderly man, who had had many interests with Dennison Brent. He called the first evening, and Lydia, now used to a butler and all the formality of her new home, insisted that he stay to dinner. He hesitated, but when she pleaded loneliness, promised to come the following evening and bring a young friend or two.

"You are too much alone," he said; "it is not good for you to seclude yourself as you have done."

There was a kindliness in his deep voice, and something so sympathetic in his dark eyes that for a moment Lydia's sleeping conscience was stirred. This man, if once he learned the truth, could be a bitter enemy; it behooved her to make him a friend. It was not until after he had left, however, that she wondered about his unexpressed sympathy, pity in fact, for he knew she had not known the man supposed to have been her father well enough to suffer for his death.

"I wonder if there's some mystery attached to that kid," she mused as she brushed the pale yellow hair she was training to lie smooth and silky against her head as Robin wore hers. "She had a funny life; there may be something she doesn't know behind it."

TRUE to his promise, at seven o'clock Shelby Landon, handsome and distinguished looking in dinner clothes, arrived at the Madison Avenue house. With him was a young man, whom he introduced as Arthur Hemmingway. Lydia, whose

knowledge of the four hundred and society had been gleaned from the movies, at once decided Hemmingway belonged to that charmed circle. He was tall, and extremely thin, dark, with a tiny waxed mustache and an interesting pallor. He wore his clothes in a manner she had never seen before, and spoke with a slight drawl, as though it was an effort to talk at all.

"I wasn't really invited, Miss Brent," he said, bending over her hand, while his slate-colored eyes, beautifully fringed with long dark lashes, swept over her perfect frock of black tulle and fragile lace. "I was in Landon's office when he invited John Stern to come to dinner with him, and Stern had a previous engagement. As I had none, I begged to substitute. Landon couldn't refuse."

"I am awfully glad he didn't," Lydia laughed. She was nervous, terribly nervous, and Landon's eyes upon her made her shiver. There was only one thing she was certain she was proficient in, and that was the making of cocktails. On the verge of offering to make them, she recalled the fact that the real Robin would not know how to do so; cocktails were an American drink. Suppose Hemmingway should speak French to her or Landon—she *must* perfect the language.

However, Rogers had seen that an excellent dinner was served. Both men possessed hearty appetites, and under the influence of some rare old wine from Brent's pre-war cellar, conversation drifted away from dangerous channels. Lydia had a keen wit, a fund of good stories, and she charmed them both. It was after twelve before they departed, and Lydia had accepted Hemmingway's invitation to tea the next afternoon.

"She came into a tidy fortune at Brent's death, didn't she?" the younger man inquired of the older as they drove uptown in Hemmingway's car.

"Yes. Or rather she will when she is eighteen." Landon frowned.

"When? You mean she isn't eighteen yet?"

"No, there are still some months to go. I'll be glad when they're over. I don't relish being guardian to a young girl."

Hemmingway whistled. "I'd have taken her for older. Boy, she has poise, and she's a beauty."

"Yes, she has poise. I suppose it's her rearing. But Dennison always spoke of her as shy. Yes, she's pretty, but hands off, Arthur! She isn't for you." He spoke so earnestly the young man looked at him in surprise.

"Why not, if I should fall in love with her?"

"I advise you not to fall in love. I repeat, Robin Brent is not for you. For that matter; I should seriously object to her—" He paused abruptly. "Drop me at the corner, will you? I think I'll walk the rest of the way."

Hemmingway whistled again and shrugged his shoulders. "Crabby old bloke! Maybe he wants to marry her himself," he said.

VIII

ON Monday morning Robin went to Mrs. Stewart's duplex apartment on Park Avenue. A beautiful room was given Robin, with a shelf of interesting books, and a victrola, with some worth-while records. A little dressing room opened off of it. The girl was enchanted with her new surroundings, and their beauty and good taste for the moment banished her distress at parting from Derry.

He promised to telephone her daily, and see her as often as her employer

would permit, though he said nothing about their marriage. But she clung to her faith in his love or she could not have faced life. He had grown to mean her whole existence. Even Madame Angèle was pushed out of her thoughts until she guiltily remembered she had not written to her old nurse, and decided to do so at once.

But she discovered that Mrs. Stewart, while kindness and consideration itself, expected value for the money she paid her, and that she had but small time for leisure. Every day there were long drives, up into Westchester, out on Long Island, through the park. Drives, during which the widow related over and over the story of how her baby had been kidnaped. Evenings, Robin read aloud to her, learned to play chess, visited the opera or the theater, or played the piano and sang, something she did very well, or helped with her embroidery.

There were many guests at the apartment, and Mrs. Stewart always expected her to join them at tea or dinner. The first week Robin had scarcely a moment to herself, and had only Derry's telephone calls to buoy her up, no time to write letters.

Then one day her employer told her if she desired she might ask Derry to come to dinner. Robin's quick blush made the lady smile. "So he is a lover?" she asked. "Tad Hooley said you were interested in a friend of his, but I didn't know you were serious."

"We are engaged."

"Really! I wonder you don't marry now, when you really need him."

"It's my wretched money," the girl answered with a burst of confidence. "He didn't know I was an heiress when he asked me to marry him . . . and now it's standing between us."

"How stupid, if you love each other. However, I should be grateful for his attitude since he has given me you. I want to meet the young man. I'll ask Mr. Hooley, also, so he won't feel shy."

Robin laughed at the thought of Derry being shy in any situation, but she went to the telephone to call him, feeling lighter of heart than she had felt for days. Derry came to the telephone at once, but when Robin gave him the invitation, he hesitated.

"I'm sorry, dear, but I'm not free to-morrow night. Next week, perhaps, or—"

An icy hand caught at Robin's heart. It wasn't the fact that he had an engagement that frightened her; it was his manner of answering her. Immediately she had visions of another woman. Perhaps he was trying to put her out of his life, perhaps he already cared for some one else more than he did for her. Her voice thickened with emotion.

"I'm sorry. Mrs. Stewart suggested it . . . but I don't know if she will invite you again."

"You can get off and have dinner with me, then," he said lightly. "I'd break my engagement if it wasn't so important, but it means a great deal . . . to both of us."

Robin swayed a little. "Both of us?"

"I can't tell you over the telephone. I will later."

"Derry," huskily, "I miss you . . . I love you very much."

"Don't miss me so much you lose sleep," he answered casually, "and just love me enough to keep up an interest in me."

Robin dropped the receiver as though it were a hot iron.

TO BE CONTINUED

Dear Deceiver

He read the answer in her eyes and all pain vanished from his own

What was the secret of the disappearance of little Molly Dennison on the eve of her engagement?

By Ethel Donoher

FROM the moment she entered the house, Beatrice felt that something was wrong. For one thing, she had always been accustomed to running upstairs at the Dennisons', during her week-end visits, to find Molly in her room or in the library, or wherever she might happen to be. She had never, in that house, been treated with formality. Now, suddenly, she had been asked by Matilda, the maid who had admitted her, to wait in the drawing-room until Miss Dennison could see her.

"But it's Miss Molly I want," the girl had explained. "Mayn't I go up and find her, Matilda?"

An odd expression had passed over the maid's face.

"If you will just wait here," she had said hurriedly, "Miss Harriet will come down to you."

And so Beatrice had waited, was still waiting.

She was sitting in a deep chair by an open window, looking around the drawing-room. What a charming room it was, with its priceless old pieces of furniture which had somehow fitted themselves in with the more modern chairs and chesterfield, covered with deep-toned velours and fashioned for solid comfort. What good times they had all had here—and what

good times they would continue to have, if Neil would be sensible. Would he be? Beatrice wondered, arising and crossing to one of the book shelves that flanked the wide fireplace. Well, she mused, she had promised to stay a week, but she wouldn't do it if Neil made things too difficult.

But why on earth was she being kept down here in this strange and formal manner? What could be the reason for it? Why had Matilda acted so strangely? For there really had been something strange, something even secretive in the maid's manner. And everything was so still; so oddly still. Could any one be ill? Could anything have happened?

Could anything have happened to—Neil? Here Beatrice felt her heart stop beating. At least, it had seemed that it stopped, and now it was thudding dully, heavily, as though with fear. She was tremendously annoyed with herself.

She had just taken a book from the shelf when Miss Harriet Dennison entered. She was a tall, spare woman, flat-chested and thin-lipped. She wore a stiff gray silk which rustled as she crossed the room.

"Sit down, child," she welcomed her. "I'm sorry to have kept you waiting. Did Matilda take your bags upstairs?"

"I don't know," Beatrice returned, seating herself opposite the older woman. "But has anything happened, Miss Harriet? Where is Molly?"

Miss Dennison hesitated a moment; then: "Yes, something has happened. And I can't answer your second question."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that we—don't know where Molly is."

"You—don't know where she is?" Beatrice repeated blankly. "But she doesn't always tell you where she's going when she goes out, does she?"

Miss Harriet's smile was grim.

"By no means," she admitted. "But she has never before remained away overnight without telling me where she was going."

"You"—Beatrice looked startled now—"you don't mean that she's been gone all night and that you don't know where she is?"

"That is exactly what I do mean."

"But I thought Archie was coming last night. That was why I didn't come until to-day—so they would have their first evening alone together."

"Archie did come," Miss Harriet reported. "He is here now—but Molly isn't, and we haven't the least idea where she is. She disappeared yesterday afternoon. So far as we can learn, Matilda was the last one who saw her. And she told Matilda that she was going to get some flowers. Then she went out, and did not return."

"Didn't she take anything with her—any clothes, I mean?"

"No. Matilda said she had no bag, and all her frocks are in her closet, except the one she was wearing."

"Oh," said Beatrice, her face paling, "something must have happened to her—something terrible!"

MISS HARRIET moved uneasily in her chair.

"What could have happened?" she argued. "Towaco is not exactly a dangerous place to live in, you know. We thought you might be able to help us, Bea. Do you know of any reason at all why Molly might go off like this, why she might not want to see Archie?"

"Indeed I don't," Beatrice said promptly. "Molly adores him. She

wrote me the happiest possible letter, telling me they are going to be married in November. Why, she *couldn't* have gone deliberately."

"Oh, I'm not so sure of that," Miss Harriet informed her. "Molly is utterly feather-brained. We both know that, and it must be taken into consideration now. The child has always been impulsive, headstrong, and spoiled. Nothing that she could do would surprise me very much."

"But this is terrible!" Beatrice exclaimed. "Little Molly, gone off like this, nobody knows where. Didn't she leave any word at all behind her? Doesn't Neil have any notion of where she might be?"

"She left no word of any sort," Miss Harriet replied. "And Neil doesn't know any more than the rest of us. He is out with Archie now. They are driving around to the nearby towns to see if Molly left from any of their railroad stations. She did not leave from the Towaco station. Every one here knows her, and—"

Miss Harriet paused as the front door opened and slammed. A moment later Neil Dennison, Molly's brother, and Archie Wallace, her *fiancé*, came into the drawing-room.

Both men greeted Beatrice gravely but warmly. Neil held her hand in his as though he could not bear to part with it.

"Did you hear anything in Boonton or Mountain Lakes?" Miss Harriet inquired.

"Nothing," Neil said quietly. "But of course that doesn't tell us anything definite. Molly was not well known at those railroad stations. She might easily have left from one of them."

"But why should she want to go away?" Beatrice cried. "Oh, haven't you any idea where she could be?"

"I wish to Heaven we had!" Archie said, his face grim and drawn. "It's a mystery, Bea—a horrible mystery. And we can find nothing which throws any light upon it. Molly was here yesterday, apparently well and happy. She knew I was coming on from Boston; that she hadn't seen me for over a month, and that she wouldn't see me again for two months—business is going to be particularly heavy—yet she has disappeared. And we haven't quarreled. The last letter I received from her was—well, she in nowise intimated that she wouldn't want to see me. Quite the opposite, in fact." He added huskily: "Something must have happened to her. Yet here we are, helpless!"

"Have you—have you called the police?" Beatrice faltered.

"No, we haven't," Neil told her. "We thought we'd wait until to-morrow, and then, if we heard nothing from her, we'd seek outside aid. If it can be avoided, we—we don't want little Molly's picture in the newspapers."

"There is one thing," Miss Harriet said, "which I cannot seem to make you take into consideration: Molly is extremely impetuous. She acts on impulse, not infrequently, without rime or reason. Oh, I know her! Haven't I lived here with her and Neil since their mother died, six years ago? Molly may have taken a sudden notion into her head to go off somewhere, and she may come back to-day."

"Why should she go without a suitcase, Aunt Harriet?" Neil asked wearily. "Although, of course, she might possibly have gone somewhere, not intending to stay. But then why wouldn't she have telephoned us?"

"Exactly," Archie agreed. "Why wouldn't she? Just as though she'd deliberately go off like this and not let

us know where she was! She's never done anything of the sort before."

"No, she hasn't," Miss Harriet admitted, "but that doesn't prove anything. Molly and the unexpected are synonymous—as you will learn for yourself when you marry her, Archie."

"If I ever do! If I ever find her!" he muttered, sinking into a chair, and burying his face in his hands.

NEIL, who looked utterly tired out, rested a consoling hand on his friend's bowed shoulder.

"Buck up, old man," he said gently. "We'll find her all right. I haven't the slightest doubt about that."

"If you ask me," Miss Harriet interposed, "I think you two boys should try to get some rest before dinner. Neither of you slept a wink last night. Why don't you try to get a nap before dinner?"

"I don't feel as though I'll ever sleep again," Archie said impatiently.

"Well, if you don't sleep, you'll be in no condition to search for Molly," Miss Harriet informed him.

"Don't you think," Beatrice asked tentatively, "that perhaps I'd better not stay?"

Neil's deep blue eyes, meeting hers, held both surprise and reproach.

"But — you wouldn't desert us, would you, Bea?" he asked.

"Oh," she assured him, "I don't want to go! In fact, I feel as though I can't bear to leave the house. I want to be here so that I'll know, just as soon as you do, where Molly is. But I thought that possibly, since you're all so upset, I might be in the way."

"You're Molly's best friend," Neil reminded her. "And we want you here."

"Of course you must stay," Miss Harriet added. "And I hope you didn't forget that crochet pattern I asked you to buy for me." Upon being informed that the visitor had brought her pattern, Miss Harriet continued, "I dare say you'd like to go to your room, now, and change before dinner. It will be ready shortly. You will have your old room."

Beatrice went upstairs, then, and bathed and dressed; but she felt as though she were moving about in a dream. Molly gone, and no one knew where! Molly, who always told her everything!

"Oh, she couldn't have gone of her own accord!" the girl thought fearfully. "If she'd had any reason for doing such a thing as that, she would have written me about it."

And yet, if Molly had suddenly determined to do something of which no one would approve, would she have written or told anybody? Miss Harriet had been right when she said that Molly was impetuous, headstrong, and spoiled. But, oh, she was such a darling! And suppose something terrible had happened to her? Dear little Molly! Oh, it would be too fearful!

When she went downstairs again, Beatrice found Neil alone in the drawing-room.

"I've been waiting for you," he said at once. "I hoped you might come down a little before the others."

"But — Miss Harriet said dinner was almost ready," Beatrice returned, a little uncomfortably. "So I hurried." She added: "But, oh, tell me, Neil, where do you really think Molly can be? What could have happened?"

"I wish you could tell us that," he gravely returned. "In fact, Aunt Harriet thought you might be able to throw some light on the affair. She thought Molly might have written you something to make you understand why

she's gone off like this when she knew Archie was coming. But she didn't explain it to you, did she?"

"Oh, no! Molly's tremendously in love with Archie. I've never known any one who was more in love. And she has never written me nor said one thing which made me feel that she'd changed even a little. I haven't any idea why she would go away. I can't believe she went of her own accord."

"But—no one would steal her, here in Towaco," Neil pointed out. "It's practically impossible for anything like that to have happened. And if she'd met with an accident of any kind we'd certainly have heard about it. Archie and I have visited the hospitals for miles around."

Beatrice shivered.

"Oh, it's terrible!" she breathed.

FOR a moment there was silence. Then:

"You didn't really want to leave us, did you, Bea?" he asked. "As I said before, you're Molly's best friend, and — besides — even though you don't care a scrap for me—you're the girl I love. So your place is here."

Beatrice fought back a sudden desire to cry, swallowed hard, and said, "I told you I didn't want to go, Neil, but that I thought you might not want any outsider here right now."

"You're not an outsider," he repeated. "You're the girl I love. But—I don't suppose you've changed your mind about marrying me, have you? You still think you don't love me and that you want to be a great actress?"

"Yes, I do," she said, avoiding his eyes. "I've been getting along so awfully well at the dramatic school. They really do think I'll amount to something."

"I wish," Neil returned morosely, "that you'd never heard of that darned school. If you'd gone in for some other line of work after your mother died, you might not have found it so fascinating that you couldn't bear to leave it."

"But I didn't take up other work," Beatrice reminded him. "I've always wanted to be an actress—a very great actress—if I could. Anyway, I've got to try, Neil. I can't waste my chance and—whatever gift I have. If I did, I—I'd always regret it."

"Why won't you marry me and go on with your work, darling? Lots of actresses are married, you know."

"And you know I don't believe in that, Neil. I don't think actresses should ever marry. If they do, they have children, and then, if their husbands have as much money as you have, they don't go back to the stage. Then all their plans and their work have gone for nothing."

"For nothing?" Neil repeated slowly. "Do you think that a husband and children are nothing?"

"Oh, no, I don't think that. They could mean a very great deal; more than anything in the world to a woman who—who wants that sort of thing. But I don't, Neil. I want — well, I want my name in electric lights on Broadway. But please let's not talk about it now. It—isn't quite fair, because I feel so sorry for you—about Molly, I mean."

Neil regarded her searchingly for a moment.

"Do you mean," he asked at last, "that you care enough about me to—mind seeing me worried about Molly?"

Beatrice flushed. Nervously she swept her pale gold hair back from her forehead. Then:

"No, of course I don't mean anything of the sort. I'm never going to

fall in love with any one. You know that."

"And how do you think you're going to be able to help it?"

"I—why"—her brown eyes slipped away from his—"I just *will* help it."

Neil sighed.

"You're so beautiful, dear, and I love you such a tremendous lot. I—"

But the entrance of Miss Harriet put an end to his pleading.

Dinner that night was a joyless affair. It seemed to Beatrice that the blithe spirit of Molly was hovering about them, and being the spirit of Molly, perhaps laughing at them a little and ordering them to cheer up. But how *could* they cheer up when they didn't know where she was nor what had become of her?

After dinner Archie refused to remain in the house. He was determined to drive around the country and make further inquiries about Molly. So Neil accompanied him. Beatrice remained with Miss Harriet. They went into the drawing-room and tried to read until eleven o'clock struck. Then Miss Harriet suggested that they should go to bed, adding that Neil would awaken them when he returned, if he had anything favorable to report.

But Beatrice could not sleep. She lay for a long time in the familiar bedroom, trying to read. At last she switched off the light, and lay motionless, staring into the darkness, trying to remember all that Molly had said in her last letter, trying to find some plausible explanation for her mysterious disappearance.

She heard Neil and Archie come in and go quietly to their rooms. Evidently they had discovered no clews.

It was perhaps half an hour later, when she was just dropping off to sleep, that Beatrice heard stealthy footsteps in the hall. Instantly wide awake and alert, she sat up in bed and listened.

YES, some one was coming down the hall, moving slowly and with extreme caution. There was something ominous about those careful muffled steps — something eerie. What could they mean? Who was out there? What was he doing? Could it be—a burglar?

As quietly as possible she slipped out of bed and crept across the room; then, trying to ignore the trembling of her knees and the rapid beating of her heart, she slowly turned the doorknob, opened the door a crack, and peered out.

A second later Beatrice stepped out into the hall, and stood staring with amazed brown eyes at the woman before her.

It was Matilda, the maid. She was carrying a tray heavily laden with food and containing a lighted candle. At sight of Beatrice she stopped short. She looked startled, dismayed.

"Matilda!" Beatrice exclaimed. "What in the world are you doing up at this time of the night and with all that food?"

Matilda opened her lips, but no sound came from them.

"Can't you speak?" the girl asked impatiently. "What's the matter with you?"

"I—I was hungry," the maid faltered. "I had a frightful toothache at dinner time and couldn't eat a thing. Then I—I got so hungry that I couldn't sleep. So I—went down to get some food. But please don't mention it to Miss Dennison, will you, Miss Nesbit? She—she wouldn't exactly begrudge it to me, but, just the same, I'd rather she didn't know."

"Very well," Beatrice agreed after a slight hesitation, "I shan't mention it to Miss Harriet. But I shouldn't think, if you stay up half the night, you'd feel much like doing your work to-morrow. I hope you don't do this often, Matilda."

"Oh, no," the woman earnestly assured her. "It was just because I had that toothache to-night and couldn't eat my dinner. Thank you, Miss Nesbit, for promising not to tell on me. Good night."

"Good night," Beatrice returned, and went back into her room.

Well, that was that! Those stealthy footsteps had belonged to no one more terrifying than Matilda, who had been confiscating some food for a midnight snack. And perhaps Matilda had told the truth about the toothache which had prevented her from eating her dinner. At any rate, one couldn't be sure, so it would be too bad to tell Miss Harriet. That lady was never too lenient with anybody, and Matilda was a good worker.

Beatrice got back into bed; but again sleep eluded her. She started to think about Neil—and that, if she wanted to sleep, was always a perilous thing to do. For Neil was, unquestionably, a disturbing person. And now, troubled as he was about Molly, he was more disturbing than ever. Beatrice found herself longing to comfort him. But of course, she reasoned, as she finally grew drowsy, that would never, never do. She was not going to be anybody's wife; she was going to be a great and famous actress.

Matilda carrying food! Was this the answer to the riddle?

One day her name would be on Broadway in electric lights.

Even though Neil was in trouble, she — couldn't — possibly — help him. But to-morrow she would see him again. That, she concluded, dropping off to sleep, would be wonderful!

Breakfast the next morning was no more lively than their dinner of the night before. Nothing had been heard from Molly. None of them knew just what to do next.

After breakfast Archie, who had intended to go home that night, but was now planning to remain until Molly was found, went off to write a few business letters. Miss Harriet went about her housekeeping duties. Beatrice and Neil wandered into the living room.

The young man looked inordinately grave, and there was pain in his deep blue eyes. Beatrice could not bear to look into them.

"I'm so sorry for you, Neil," she said unsteadily. "Oh, I'm so sorry! I know what pals you and Molly have always been, and I know how frightfully unhappy you must be now. Oh, poor, dear little Molly! Can't we do something?"

"What can we do except put the matter in the hands of the police?" he asked heavily. "And I don't want to do that unless I must."

He looked so desolate, so tired, that Beatrice felt all her defenses going down before him. And she did not care. She wanted to put her arms around his neck, to press her lips to his, and so, for at least a moment, drive the pain out of his eyes. And she wanted, she soon discovered, to do even more than that.

"Oh, Neil," she said shakily, "I do love you—and, if you want me to, I'll marry you."

Neil's head, which had been sunk upon his chest, came up with a jerk.

"Bea," he asked huskily, "do you mean it?"

He read the answer in her eyes—and, at that moment, no vestige of pain remained in his own. He opened his arms and gathered Beatrice close.

HIS lips had just touched hers when an exclamation sounded behind them.

"Well!" said Miss Harriet. "Of course I'm sorry that I had to interrupt you, but, since I have, won't you please tell me, Bea, if you have, at last, decided to marry Neil?"

Beatrice, who, brightly flushed, had drawn away from the arms about her, nodded her head in happy assent.

"Well," said Miss Harriet again, "I must say I'm glad! It's about time you made up your mind, Bea. That boy has waited long enough for you."

"But she was worth it, Aunt Harriet," Neil interposed. "You'll have to admit that. Why, I'd rather wait for Bea for thirty years than marry any other girl to-morrow. In fact, nothing could induce me ever to marry any other girl."

"Let's hope, though, that Bea won't keep you waiting for thirty years," his aunt returned dryly. Then, turning to his *fiancée*, she added: "I'll promise to go away and leave you two young people alone, if you'll go upstairs, Beatrice, and get that crochet pattern you said you brought for me. I haven't seen it yet. I get so nervous, sitting around doing nothing and wondering where Molly can be. I thought I'd try to do a little crocheting."

"I'll get it for you right away," Beatrice promised, and went lightly up the stairs to her room.

She would hurry back, she decided, as she searched her suitcase for the

pattern, because Neil was waiting for her. Now that they were going to be married—her heart beat tumultuously at this thought—they would have so much to talk about.

How funny she had been, trying to pretend, even to herself, that she didn't love Neil! When all the time she loved him so much. How wonderfully glad she would always be that she had been here when he was so unhappy about Molly that he needed, most desperately, the girl he loved.

Having found Miss Harriet's pattern, she was just leaving the room with it when, for the second time in twenty-four hours, Matilda both startled and astonished her.

Once again the maid was making her way along the hall with peculiar stealth.

At sight of Beatrice she paused and glanced hastily about, as though seeking refuge. There was on her face the same look of guilt and indecision that Beatrice had noticed there when she intercepted her in the night.

"What's wrong now, Matilda?" she asked briskly, and a little impatiently. "Why are you creeping about the hall like that in the broad daylight? Surely you're not afraid you'll awaken somebody now, are you?"

"N-no, miss, of course not. And—and I wasn't creeping," Matilda stammered. "I was just walking along."

"Wait a minute!" Beatrice exclaimed, darting forward and pointing to the frock of apricot organdie which was lying over the maid's arm. "What are you doing with that? It's Miss Molly's dress. You know it is."

Matilda drew back, looked as though she wanted to run.

"I—I—yes, I know," she stammered, and seemed unable to say anything more.

"Matilda," Beatrice sternly and impulsively demanded, "do you know where Miss Molly is, and are you taking that dress to her?"

"No, oh, no!" the maid cried. "I—I just thought I'd press the dress, Miss Nesbit. I saw it hanging in Miss Molly's closet, and I—well, I felt so bad about her having gone off like this that I—I wanted to do something for her."

"I don't believe you," Beatrice told her. "And do you know what I *do* believe? I think now, and feel pretty sure I'm right, that Miss Molly is not only within your reach, but *right here in this house.* I think you're taking that dress to her now, and that you were carrying food to her last night."

"Oh, no, miss!" Matilda seemed very near tears now. "How can you think—"

"Tell me the truth," Beatrice insisted. "There's no use trying to deceive me, Matilda. I simply don't believe you."

But nothing she could say would induce Matilda to deviate from her original story. Finally, balked, but by no means beaten, Beatrice was forced to allow the girl to go away. Then Beatrice, instead of hurrying downstairs, went back into her room to think over the astonishing new development.

WHAT should she do? Should she tell Miss Harriet and Neil of her suspicions? But, oh, no, she couldn't tell Neil! They might be only suspicions, without any foundation whatsoever. And then Neil, who was already so worried and unhappy about Molly, would be bitterly disappointed. No, it would never do to tell Neil unless she was sure she was right. And if she should tell Miss Harriet what she suspected, that lady would consider her just plain crazy.

But there was still Archie Wallace to consider. Would it be wise to tell him that she thought Matilda could lead them to Molly? Perhaps not. For Archie, like Neil, would be instantly hopeful, and would suffer bitter disappointment if it developed that, after all, Matilda had spoken the truth.

Still, Beatrice reasoned, she would have to tell *somebody*—and if it was a choice between Neil and Archie risking disappointment, she instantly determined that it should be Archie.

Yes, she would tell Molly's *fiancé;* then he could do as he liked about speaking to Miss Harriet. Also, he could question Matilda—perhaps to some purpose.

Oh, what could it mean? Was Molly actually hiding somewhere in this house? And, if she was, *why* was she? It would not be easy to suspect such a thing of any one else but Molly. Molly, however, was a law unto herself. She did, almost always, whatever she wanted to do, regardless of the consequences.

Of one thing alone Beatrice was certain: if Molly actually was hiding in the house or near it, her reason for doing so would seem, to all who were anxious about her, a most insufficient one. Molly was like that: things which seemed unimportant to other people could become suddenly and overwhelmingly important to her.

A rush of hot indignation swept over Beatrice. If Molly was near them, and could end their suspense by showing herself, how dared she behave like this and worry Neil half to death? Of course Archie and all of them were tremendously upset; but—well, Molly simply hadn't any *right* to harrow Neil. What if she, herself, had not been here to comfort him?

But then what if, after all, Matilda had told the truth and really didn't know where Molly was? In that case—oh, poor little Molly!

It was all so baffling, so confusing.

Finally Beatrice arose and went downstairs in search of Archie to suggest that they should search the house even more thoroughly for Molly, and then put Matilda under a sort of home-made third degree.

She found him in the drawing-room with Neil and Miss Harriet. He was pacing back and forth, seemingly absorbed in thought. How, Beatrice wondered, could she draw him away from the others without causing comment?

Miss Harriet had just thanked her for the pattern when Archie began to speak, nervously, broodingly:

"If we don't hear anything this afternoon, I think we should ask the police to search for her, don't you? We can't go on this way, you know—just waiting and searching blindly. It's too horrible. I keep thinking of all the things that may have happened to her—"

Just then it was that Miss Harriet screamed. She screamed, pointed toward the doorway, and shrieked, "*Molly Dennison!*"

THE other occupants of the room swung round to face the doorway. What they saw was a small, slim girl in a frock of apricot organdie.

She was not exactly pretty, but there was something elfin about her face with its black-lashed gray eyes and wide mouth that drooped childishly now at the corners. Her hair, though, almost spoiled the picture. It was very straight, and neither long nor short, but of the length which defies hairpins, and yet, when left unre-

strained, manages almost to disfigure its owner.

Archie strode forward, caught her up in his arms, and held her as though he would never let her go.

"Molly!" he said huskily. "Darling, darling, *where* have you been?"

"Upstairs in the attic," Molly confessed, like a small, repentant child.

He looked stunned.

"In the attic!" he echoed. "What on earth were you doing there?"

"Hiding," Molly admitted. "I was hiding—from you, darling. You see, I—I'm letting my hair grow. And it looks so *awful*—oh, so *very* awful!"

"You were—letting your hair grow!" He repeated her words again, incredulously this time.

"Yes," said Molly, looking a little defensive, now. "Oh, you won't understand, I suppose, because you've never been a girl with straight hair that had reached this perfectly poisonous length. But mine is so straight that if I try to put a net on it the ends stick right out through the net. It won't even turn up a little at the back the way it's supposed to, now, when it's growing. And there's no use having it curled, because the curl won't stay in it more than a half hour. Oh, it's *so* straight! And it's so fine that I'm afraid to have a permanent—besides, it's all right straight when it is long or very short. But you *wanted* me to let it grow, dear. You've suggested it several times; so I thought I'd surprise you—and—and I guess I have."

"But—I don't understand," Archie told her, still deeply puzzled. "Why did you hide?"

"Because I simply couldn't *bear* to let you see me with my hair like this. I—I was afraid you might stop loving me. But I couldn't bear to cut it off, either, because I've endured so much, having let it grow this far, and I knew it would be long enough to put up in two months, when you came again. I worried about it for days, darling, and then, just before you came, it suddenly occurred to me that if I hid in the attic all the time you were here you would never see my hair in this dreadful state. But I—I couldn't *stand* it. I couldn't stay up there. I knew you were going home to-night, and I just thought I'd die if I didn't see you. So I—came down."

"Jehoshaphat!" said Archie, holding her, nevertheless, very close.

"Molly Dennison," Miss Harriet began in scandalized tones, "do you mean to say that you were hiding in the attic all this time? I was up there looking around. Where were you then? We've been worried to death about you and—"

"Oh, but *you* weren't worried to death, Aunt Harriet," Molly said coaxingly. "You know you weren't. You're so sensible. Nothing disturbs you too much. And I *couldn't* tell you. I hid behind some trunks when you came up in the attic, because I knew you'd never keep my secret. I was going to send word to Bea, though, and let her know where I was, for Matilda told me that Bea caught her bringing me something to eat last night—"

"Oh, so Matilda knew all the time where you were, and has been feeding you! If I have anything to say about it, that girl shall be discharged. Think of all the hypocritical untruths she told me about seeing you go out to pick flowers!"

"But I asked her to tell you that," Molly acknowledged. "And I won't have Matilda discharged, Aunt Harriet. She's been awfully good—"

"Darling," Archie interposed,

"how did you ever expect to explain to me where you'd been all the time I was here?"

"Well, I thought I'd write you, after you'd gone home, and explain that just as I was leaving the house that day—to pick flowers, you know—I received a letter from Helen Carter, a friend of mine in Passaic, who was very ill, and who wanted me to come to her. I was going to tell you I jumped on the train, expecting to stay with Helen just that afternoon, but that I found her alone and so ill that I had to stay right on. And I was going to explain that, although I couldn't call up and tell you where I was because Helen had no telephone, I wrote you a letter, and then never knew until I got home that you hadn't received it, and that no one here had any idea where I was."

"But we learned from the station master that you had not taken a train from here," Archie told her gravely. "So how could I have believed that you were in Passaic?"

"Oh," said Molly, "I never thought about your asking the station master! Are you very angry with me, darling? I suppose I've behaved badly, and that you've been worried; but I—I couldn't help thinking, when I first hid in the attic, that it would be better for you to worry a little than to see how awful I looked with my hair this way, and then stop loving me."

"But how could you possibly think I'd stop loving you? And you worried all the others, too — Neil, Miss Nesbit, and Miss Dennison."

"Well, I told you that I was going to let Bea know to-day where I was," Molly reminded him. "And as for Neil, he wasn't worried a bit. He knew all the time right where I was."

"Neil Dennison," Miss Harriet demanded, "do you mean to say that you, too, knew where Molly was and never told us?"

BEATRICE turned to him. Neil had known all the time where Molly was! He had deliberately played upon her sympathy. And she had been so sorry for him! She had even been more indignant with Molly for making her brother so unhappy than for worrying any of the others. Yet all the time Neil had been the only one in the house who wasn't really worried!

"Just a minute, Aunt Harriet, and I'll explain," Neil said, avoiding Beatrice's indignant eyes. "I did know where Molly was, but I knew she wouldn't stay up in that attic long. I felt darn sure she'd never let Archie go without seeing him, no matter how much she'd determined to keep out of sight. Honestly, I had no idea she'd stay up there this long. But I had to promise not to tell any of you where she was, because she swore that if I didn't promise, she'd go out in the wood and hide, rather than let Archie see her hair. And, knowing the young woman as I do, I thought she might be quite capable of it. So I really did think that the wisest thing I could do would be to keep quiet and let Molly have her way for the present. I did want to tell you all, of course, when I saw how worried you were; but I was sure that if Archie knew where she was he'd march straight up to the attic. Then I thought Molly would probably be so mad that she'd quarrel with him, and afterward accuse me of ruining her life, or something equally pleasant. Anyway, it seemed to me that Archie would be better off in the end if I left Molly to do her own explaining."

"What she needs," Archie asserted, "is a good spanking. And I think I'll take her out now and administer it."

He lifted Molly up in his arms, then, and strode with her toward the door.

"You aren't angry with me, Bea, are you?" Molly called to her friend over her *fiancé's* shoulder. "I'll see you later—after"—she smiled impishly—"after I've been chastised."

"No, you bad little goose, I'm not angry with you, even though you've worried me half to death," Beatrice returned.

Then Molly and Archie left the room.

"Humph!" said Miss Harriet. "Precious little chastising she'll ever get from that lad! And if ever anybody deserved it, she does! As for you, Neil, I'm surprised at you. I never thought you'd deceive me like this. But I presume you wish I'd go out, now, and leave you and Bea alone."

"Oh, please don't go," Beatrice urged. "Sit down and let's talk about all that happened. Isn't it really wonderful that Molly is safe, after all? I know you feel that way, even though you're annoyed with her."

"Yes, of course it's wonderful that she's safe—bad little thing though she is!—but we'll talk about that later. I can't stay now."

And Beatrice, who felt defiantly anxious to show Neil how little she desired to be alone with him, could not coax her to linger.

When Aunt Harriet had gone, Neil asked: "Are you angry with me, dearest?"

"*Am* I!" Beatrice retorted. "Oh, *am* I! And don't call me dearest."

"But, sweetheart—"

"Nor sweetheart, either," she interrupted swiftly. "Don't you dare to call me that! I'm not your sweetheart, and the sooner you realize it the better pleased I shall be."

"Why—you promised to marry me—"

"Yes, I did. And why? Because I felt so sorry for you when you made me believe you hadn't any idea where Molly was. Yet, all the time you knew very well that she was perfectly safe up in that attic."

"But was that the only reason why you promised to marry me? Didn't you do it because you loved me?"

"Well, you tricked me into imagining I'd fallen in love with you. That was what you did. You made me so sorry for you. And you did it deliberately."

"Well, what if I did see my chance and seize it? Can you blame me, darling? I've loved you infinitely for a long, long time, you know."

"NEVERTHELESS," Beatrice persisted, "you had no right to—to deceive me like that. It wasn't fair, and you know it. I was so worried about Molly, too. You could have relieved my mind—and you didn't. The real truth is that you're just like Molly. Each of you will do anything that enters your head, regardless of whether or not you're being fair to anybody else."

"But Archie forgave her," Neil pointed out soberly, boyishly. "He loved her enough to forgive her. She was lucky, wasn't she?"

Typical of Neil, that was. No one on earth could be more appealing.

Beatrice looked determinedly away; tried to harden her heart against him; but the pathos in his tone, the pain that she knew had crept again into his blue eyes, made it inordinately difficult.

"You looked just like that when I

was sorry for you before—and it was all play-acting, every bit of it," she said in a last desperate effort to hold out against him.

"It wasn't play-acting," Neil told her. "I felt then just as unhappy as I feel now—because you don't love me."

After that there was no further use for Beatrice to struggle against the thing she was longing to do, so she moved over on the chesterfield until she was close beside Neil; then she slipped her arm about his neck.

"Oh, I do love you!" she whispered. "I do, I *do!* I was furious with you because you were so *bad*—but somehow I can't stay mad at you. And I will marry you. I don't even want to go on the stage. I love you so much that I know, now, I'll never want to leave you. And—"

But whatever she might have said further was crushed against Neil's lips. And that time no one interrupted their kiss. It was, Beatrice felt radiantly confident, the longest one in history.

Meanwhile, in the dining room, a girl with hair in its most awkward and unprepossessing stage of growth, was asking the man whose arms were crushing her to him: "And do you really love me, even with my hair like this, Archie? Are you *sure?* I look so perfectly *hideous.*"

He kissed the top of that unruly mop of hair; then he kissed Molly on the lips.

"Hideous—*you!*" he scoffed tenderly. "Why, darling, you're more beautiful than ever—and I wouldn't have supposed you could be. I adore you."

"Oh," said Molly happily, "I don't deserve you, dearest—but how I love you!"

Back in the drawing-room, Neil was still kissing Beatrice. He gave, in fact, no indication that he might, for a very long time, do anything else.

"And don't you think, now," she asked when at last she could use her lips for that purpose, "that I'm as forgiving, and that I love you as much as Archie loves Molly? For, oh, darling, I *do!*"

"I think," said Neil, happily confident now, "that you love me and that I love you more than any one else in the world ever loved anybody. Therefore, we'll always be happier than all the rest of the world put together."

And that, at exactly the same moment, was hauntingly like something Archie Wallace was saying to the tousel-headed Molly Dennison.

"We're happier than any two people ever have been, or ever will be—because no two people ever loved each other so much," he was declaring, punctuating his conversation with kisses.

And so fervently did Molly agree with every word he said that Archie had no further need for conversation—only for punctuation.

Nora hesitated. Was there a sinister meaning in her words?

The Second Kiss

Hated lips pressed Nora's and called her sweetheart; loved lips claimed her own—and branded her flirt!

By Moira O'Malley

THE giant ship glittered with myriad lights. She moved on the still olive of the twilight sea like a great oval jewel on deep-piled velvet. It was the last night out, the night dedicated by immemorial custom to the captain's dinner.

Swift chattering excitement ran like fire from table to table in the huge, crystal-domed dining hall. Gorgeous evening gowns bloomed like rare exotic flowers beside the dull black of masculine dinner coats. Eyes outdid the sparkle of the diamonds lavishly displayed against lamé and velvet. For to-morrow this gay company of sophisticated travelers would scatter: to Paris, to Italy, to Monte Carlo.

To the slim girl who paused for a moment in the curve of the wide stairs, the scene had all the charm of unreality. If any one had told her a month ago that she would be dining to-night on one of the swiftest liners afloat she would have laughed aloud. But here she was. It was too marvelous, she told herself.

Her eyes turned automatically to a table for four in the center of the room. Yes, he was already down, sitting next to that funny fat woman who was terribly rich, every one said, and socially prominent in New York and Paris. Mrs. Otterby, her name was. He was with her a lot.

Nora Shayne sighed as she saw the dark head of the man who absorbed her interest bend attentively to the marcelled gray one at his side. Of course he had charming manners, this Andrew Michelet. He was used to the best, in people and things. While she—

But he wasn't going to be serious to-night. Her small head, with its crown of smoky black curls, lifted resolutely. Her lips curved in a carefully light smile. She would recapture the spirit of joyous gayety that had made everything that happened on this boat a lovely joke, until that afternoon.

Outwardly, at least, she was successful, as she threaded her way between tables that sparkled with silver and glass to her own place in the corner. She looked a sweet, care-free child, dressed like a grown-up for a party. And the tall, good-looking boy who jumped up to welcome her very evidently thought that an exceedingly nice way indeed to look.

NORA'S smile deepened to one of real pleasure as he pushed in her chair. He was awfully nice, Ken Blakeslee. They'd had such fun; circling the deck in fast bracing walks, talking and dancing, and—well, yes, flirting just a little. He was a marvelous playmate. But she didn't really want to think about Ken to-night. Even though his words thrilled her.

"Nora!" he was saying, his voice too low to carry beyond her own small ears. "You're lovely to-night. Lovely."

"Me lovely?" Nora repeated. "I should think that here among all these gorgeous-looking women you wouldn't even see me!"

"Are there any other women here?" Ken asked her with a smile that assured her that for him, anyway, there was only one.

Nora dimpled with pleasure. But the sooty curtain of her lashes hid the sparkle in her blue eyes as she answered him demurely:

"Of course. Beautiful women, with perfectly gorgeous clothes."

Ken pretended to study the occupants of the big room before his nice gray eyes came back to the small curly head at his side.

"I deny the beautiful," he insisted. "You're the only one who can qualify for that. You're always lovely, Nora. But to-night there's something about you, a radiance that—that almost hurts."

Nora sighed, a faint little sound of regret. Yesterday all this would have been part of a perfectly delightful game. A game that she wouldn't let herself imagine as ever turning into something real. Ken was a dear boy. But, well—that was just it. He *was* a boy. Light-hearted, irresponsible.

And that afternoon Nora had met a man! One whose dark, handsome face disturbed her now. His tall straight figure, the perfect fit of his expensively tailored clothes, the way he moved and held his head were miraculously

familiar. They were so like the attributes of a mythical man who had crossed and recrossed the fabric of her dreams. She was hoping now that he, too, thought her lovely.

When his deep-set black eyes had looked into hers, earlier that day, and she had read in them a dawning interest, an instantaneous admiration, she had wondered. There was something, something fleeting and evanescent, that was still strong enough to bother her. It did not belong to her dream man. Nora felt that she had to see him again, talk to him. She had to find out if what she had seen was real.

She gave a little start. Ken was speaking to her again. She knew from the echo of his words that his voice had changed, dropped from the tender banter of a moment ago to intense gravity. But she hadn't really heard a thing he said. She turned quickly, her fresh red lips smiling apology.

"I'm awfully sorry," she said. "I—I'm afraid I wasn't listening."

"And I'm afraid you won't want to," he told her. There was an unwonted frown on his tanned forehead, faint bitterness in his usually merry eyes. "But I've got to speak. I saw you talking to Andrew Michelet this afternoon. Just how well do you know him, Nora?"

Nora stared at him, her clear blue eyes wide with astonishment. "Why, I—" she said and stopped. "What a funny thing to ask!"

"I didn't intend to amuse you," Ken said shortly. "I want to know. How well *do* you know him?"

Nora could not understand herself as she hesitated. There was no reason why she shouldn't tell Ken frankly that she had just met Andrew Michelet that afternoon. But she wanted to find out what had made him ask her. She thought she knew, but she wasn't sure.

"Well—" she began slowly, "in one way I hardly know him at all, but in another—" She let her voice trail off, wondering what Ken would make of that, and wondering still more why she had said it.

"Nora, please!" He twisted his broad shoulders, leaned a little toward her, trying to read the eyes that she kept willfully on her plate. "It's not like you to talk that way. I don't understand you."

"Don't you?" Nora asked, flashing him a quick smile. "Perhaps I don't understand *you*. Tell me what made you ask that question and I'll tell you the answer." She waited, pretending to study the engraved pattern on a silver spoon.

Ken's reply was a long time in coming. "I'm not going to tell you," he said finally.

A perverse dimple appeared for a moment in Nora's cheek. "I didn't think you would," she assured him. "You wouldn't dare."

But Ken ignored her thrust. "You mustn't have anything to do with him," he said evenly.

Nora stiffened. Really this was too much! "Why not?" she asked coldly.

"Because—well, because I ask you not to." Ken's look pleaded with her, but she hardened her heart against it. He was being impossible.

"Really, Ken!" she expostulated, "I'm not a child!"

Suddenly the frown vanished from his brown young face. A smile, tender and adoring, took its place. "But you are, Nora. A dear child. That's why—" He stopped. The smile went as quickly as it had come.

"Please," he begged. "You're

young, inexperienced. Please do as I ask. Michelet isn't your kind, Nora."

Nora was angry. She *wasn't* a child. Why, she was really years older than Ken. She hadn't been sheltered and coddled. She had made her own way in the world. What right had this boy at her side to dictate her actions? Her hands trembled and she hid them in her lap. He mustn't see how agitated she was.

"I'm quite able to take care of myself," she assured him frostily. "I've been doing it for some time."

"I suppose you think I'm jealous," said Ken bitterly.

"Well—aren't you?" Nora asked, and turned a small offended shoulder on him.

But something he had said lingered in her mind.

NOT her kind? Rather she was not Andrew's kind. She had known that long before he had become so important to her as a person. For she had seen him often enough before that afternoon, and always she had seen him with the richest, most prominent people on board. Talking to men who had success in Wall Street written all over them. Playing bridge with women whose gowns shrieked Paris, who would go unadorned rather than wear an imitation jewel.

And knowing all the time that it was to these people that Andrew belonged had made her afraid to-night, in spite of herself. Her powder-blue chiffon had seemed so lovely, so right, when she had made it with patient stitches. But in this luxurious setting it was nothing but cheap and rather pathetic makeshift. Andrew could surely see that she was—counterfeit. And he would never keep the date he had made with her to-night.

Nora's curly black head went up. Her eyes, blue as an inland lake in the sun, sparkled now with anger at herself. She, Nora Shayne, to be ashamed of her poverty! She was the daughter of Patrick Shayne, wasn't she? Patrick Shayne, who had won three medals for bravery. Who had been a captain in New York's picked fire department. And she was the daughter of lovely, delicate Renée Delaine, her French mother, who had married the handsome young fireman almost before she could speak the language of her adopted country. Her mother, whose brave spirit never faltered, no matter how much her strength might fade.

This time it was a woman's sharp, metallic voice that cut through Nora's reverie. She jumped. She had forgotten all about her employer, Miss Thatcher. "Nora's off again," she heard her say now. "She's always half asleep unless some man is talking to her."

Nora felt hot color rush to her cheeks, but she tried to look unconcerned. Miss Thatcher was furious with her, she knew. She'd never liked her, but to-night there was real venom in her voice. Nora had felt it all the time they were dressing in their cramped cabin.

"Did you speak to me, Miss Thatcher?" she asked meekly. The was no use resenting the older woman's manner.

"No, but your attitude is hardly flattering to any of us." Miss Thatcher's eyes were pinpoints of rage beneath the smooth ripples of her carefully waved hair. But she allowed no ugly curve to twist the half smile of her lacquered lips.

"That dress is frightfully becoming," Nora ventured placatingly.

"So kind of you to notice it." Thelma Thatcher's voice was stifled. Nora could not know how the delicate beauty of her heart-shaped little face enraged the older woman. How Miss Thatcher ached to obliterate the lovely youth that had been able to attract a man who remained serenely oblivious to her own, maturer charms. Nora only knew that her employer never missed an opportunity to stab her with sharp little arrows of dislike. And to-night the arrows were poison-tipped.

Nora was sorry. She had wanted to like her as much as she respected her ability. For Miss Thatcher was the cleverest dress-buyer in New York, so they said. And she worked for Merlin, Inc., the big store where Nora had earned her living since her father and mother were killed in an accident on her fourteenth birthday.

She remembered how excited she had been when she heard that she had been chosen to go with Miss Thatcher to Paris. She was to act as a sort of secretary-errand-girl. And she had been selected from all the typists because of the French she remembered from her mother's teaching. Humanly, Nora loved beautiful clothes. Although she never expected to wear them, she thrilled at the thought of down-soft velvet, of diaphanous laces, of thick, rich furs, the pelts of fabulous animals from the far North.

But far greater than her love for the lovely things that come out of it was her love for Paris itself. Her mother's home! To Nora, about to see it for the first time, it was a magic city, draped in the silver mist of her dreams.

"I suppose you think you made a conquest this afternoon," said Miss Thatcher. "You'll have to learn to distinguish between politeness and interest, you know." But as her sharp eyes looked off across the room, she stopped short.

Nora realized suddenly that Andrew Michelet was watching her. Watching her with the compelling gaze that made her heart beat in faster rhythm. But she kept her tone jaunty, unconcerned.

"A conquest?" she asked. "When? I don't remember any this afternoon," and laughed lightly.

But Miss Thatcher chose to ignore her now. She was talking to the middle-aged business man on her right. And she went on ignoring her through dessert, to the girl's intense gratitude.

AN hour later Nora stood with Andrew Michelet, far forward on the almost deserted deck. In the ballroom below saxophone and drum moaned and beat with echoes of the jungle. There was something sad and yet exhilarating about music heard thus through frosty, starlit air. Nora swayed a little, caught by the spell of the throbbing night. The tall man at her side bent his dark head in an endeavor to read her poignant, lovely face.

"You love all this, don't you?" His low vibrant voice was tender. His gesture included the spangled vault above them, the mysterious black carpet of the sea below and the eerie music drifting past.

"Oh, yes." Nora's soft voice was little more than a breath. "I love it. It's beautiful. And Paris—my mother used to tell me about it. She was French, you know. The Bois, with its winding, shady paths; the boulevards, all lights and big, glittering shops; and the Champs Elysées, with little tables on the pavement, under the blooming chestnut trees. She used to say the flowers were like white feathers from an angel's wing."

Nora was silent, seeing again that dream picture: herself at one of those tables, sipping coffee from a fragile cup, looking up into the adoring eyes of her companion. A man of the world, he was, sophisticated, charming and kind. The man who loved her. Black hair he had, with just a dust of white at the temples, black eyes that looked more than he could say, and a clear olive skin that spoke of exercise and clean, accomplished living. All these he had and so had Andrew Michelet.

"Funny little girl." Andrew's strong brown hand closed over her small white one. "You're just a romantic child at heart," he told her. "Life disappoints us, sometimes." He separated her fingers, caressing them gently one by one.

"I know it does." Nora spoke slowly, her voice quivering a little. "Tonight, in the dining room. All those marvelous clothes. The women—they were so—so finished. I felt—oh, I don't know. Unimportant, I guess."

Andrew was studying her, a curious, speculative gleam in his eyes. "I'm glad you're not completely unworldly," he said softly. "I was beginning to think—you know, any one as lovely as you are ought to have lovely things. I can see you in velvet, black as midnight against your silver skin. Velvet lit by the blue fire of sapphires, no bluer than your eyes."

Nora sighed, a soft little sound of longing evoked by the picture in his words. "I do love beautiful clothes," she admitted, and then added in a lighter tone, "But honestly, I'm not terribly unhappy without them. I wouldn't let myself be wretched just because I couldn't have—things."

Her hand was still in Andrew's, and now he gave it a tender little pressure. "Adorable child!" he said. "Is there something else that it *would* make you wretched—to do without?"

Nora's heart turned over with a startling thud. What did he mean? Was he going to ask her— So soon? But he mustn't. She felt like two different girls. One of them was achingly anxious to have him go on—he was so attractive, so much the man she had dreamed of but never expected to meet. But the other half of her sounded a warning. She wasn't sure—yet.

"Why, yes," she said quickly. "There is something. I *am* wretched—about Miss Thatcher. I'd like to have her good opinion."

To her surprise, Andrew accepted this calmly. "Why?" he asked. "You don't like her, do you?"

Nora's mind was in a whirl. A moment ago she had seized upon Miss Thatcher thankfully as a safe topic. But she hadn't really expected him to let her change the subject so easily.

"I oughtn't to talk about her." She managed to sound casual. "She's my boss, and if it weren't for her I wouldn't be here at all."

"But you don't like her all the same," Andrew insisted.

"I want to, but I can't," Nora admitted suddenly. Her voice shook as she remembered all the cutting things Miss Thatcher had said to her.

"Then why stay with her?"

The question sounded reasonable, but Nora stared at him in astonishment. "What on earth would I do without her, in Paris?" she asked. And instantly wished she hadn't as he made the swift return:

"I can think of one thing!"

"Every one knows that jobs are awfully scarce there," Nora rushed on breathlessly. "But I wouldn't leave her anyway, just because I didn't like

her. It's only—I don't want her to hate me. And she does. Though I can't understand why."

Andrew laughed suddenly. "My dear! Look in the mirror!" His dark eyes were warm with admiration. "You're lovely, little Nora, and young. She isn't."

"Oh!" said Nora. And then that elusive dimple dented her soft cheek. "But she has such heavenly clothes. And you said yourself that I—needed them."

"I didn't!" Andrew denied hotly. "I said that I was glad you were human enough to want them. That you ought to have them." He carried her hand to his lips. He kissed her pink fingertips slowly, as if each one were a precious new discovery.

Nora was silent. She knew she ought to draw her hand away, but she couldn't. She was grateful for the velvet dark that masked the color in her cheeks.

"I—it's the same thing," she faltered. "You noticed that I didn't—have them."

"And you cared what I thought?" Andrew's voice was a caress. He had both her hands now, fluttering prisoners in his strong clasp. "Tell me you did, Nora—darling."

But Nora would not answer, would not meet his compelling black eyes.

"You were lovely to-night," he said softly. "You—your freshness, your youth made you seem like one real bloom in a bouquet of artificial flowers." His voice dropped, took on vibrant intensity. "Little Nora, do you know how sweet you are?"

Suddenly his arms went around her, straining her close. Swiftly his dark head descended. His lips met hers in a long, fierce kiss, a kiss that seemed to have no beginning and no end. And it was only then that she knew, with startling clarity, that she did not want his lips on hers, his arms about her.

FOR a moment Nora was stunned. Her heart pounded in outraged protest. But she could not move. And then her strength returned and she found herself fighting.

But Andrew only held her closer, laughing at her struggle, as his lips sought hers again.

"Little devil!" he chuckled. "Why pretend? You know you expected this, wanted my arms around you, my kisses."

"I didn't! I don't! Let me go. Let me go, please!" Nora cried frantically, but she knew that she was powerless to break that tightening hold.

Tears gathered in her lovely eyes, welled over and ran down her hot cheeks. She had almost thought that she was beginning to love this man. This man who dared to hold her against her will, to sear her lips with unwanted kisses. But she mustn't think about that. She must use her wits to get out of this.

She relaxed suddenly against his shoulder. "Andrew!" she whispered. "What's that? Listen!"

His face was a bare inch from hers as she sounded her feeble little warning. But it did not come any closer. He was absolutely still, obeying her command. And, to Nora's intense surprise, they both heard a faint scrape, like a cautious footstep on the deck behind them.

It was an answer to prayer, that sound. She hadn't dreamed of such luck, nor deserved it, she realized. Andrew's arms dropped to his sides, and he uttered a vicious: "Damn!"

Quickly she stepped back a few paces, with a sobbing breath of relief.

His eager mouth came down on hers in a hard, demanding pressure

"You may have had some reason for thinking I was leading you on to do that," she said evenly. "I wasn't sure myself how I felt about you until it—happened. But I hate you for not letting me go. And for kissing me—like that." She stamped a small, angry foot. "I hate you, I tell you! And I never want to see you again. Never!"

She did not wait to hear what he might say. She turned and ran, darting around ghostly lifeboats and dodging stacks and ventilators. Her eyes were seeking the dark cavern of the companionway, and so she was totally unprepared for the man who stepped out of the shadows and stopped directly in her path. She came against him with a hard thud that knocked her almost breathless.

"Oh," she panted. "Oh!" and tried to steady herself so that she might step back for a hurried apology.

But for the second time that night a man's arms closed about her swiftly, and would not let her go. Nora's heart pounded in angry terror. Had Andrew gone around the other way, to catch her here? Had he dared?

She lifted her head to peer up at her captor, but she had only time for a second's revealing glance, before his eager mouth came down on hers in a hard, demanding pressure.

A strange thrill swept through her, set her whole being atingle. She snuggled against him as her lips,

trembling with sheer happiness, returned his kiss. She knew and cared nothing except that this was the man she loved and that she was in his arms, close to a heart that was pounding madly because she was there.

"Ken," she murmured huskily a moment later. "Oh, Ken. It was you, then."

The tall boy who loomed above her, a shadow of strength against the night, seemed to grow taller as he straightened his broad shoulders. His hands were on her elbows now, holding her away from him. His voice fell on her startled ears, crisp and icy.

"Thanks for helping me to make an interesting experiment," he said.

"Ken!" Nora was frantic with horror. "What are you saying? Didn't—that kiss—mean anything—to you?"

"It meant—hell!" said Ken in a low, tortured voice. "I saw you, not three minutes ago, in another man's arms. Returning *his* kiss. I loved you, Nora. I thought you were everything that was sweet and pure and untouched. And then I saw you letting that—that mucker make love to you." He stopped to stare at her miserably.

"Even then I thought you must care about him, or you wouldn't let him do it. But I had to know. So I deliberately caught you as you came by. And I kissed you to find out if you were ready to let any man sample your pretty red lips. And—I found out. Oh, yes. I found out." He laughed, a bitter, mirthless sound.

Nora felt as if her blood had turned to ice in her veins. She could hardly believe her ears. Ken's kiss, coming so soon after that other one, had been a revelation to her troubled heart. And all the time she had been in his arms, blissfully sure of their love, he had been thinking—this.

But the thing that hurt her most helped to stiffen her back with pride, to send her head up. He thought that she had been yielding lightly to a moment's thrill. Well, he must go on thinking that. She could not let him know how important his kiss had been to her when he did not value it at all. That would be the final degradation. She managed to laugh, though she never knew how she did it, afterward. It was a light laugh, careless and faintly derisive.

"Oh, Ken," she said, "you're such a kid! What's a kiss, after all?" She gathered her cloak about her, half turned for flight. "You ought to thank me for showing you that life isn't always serious. You'll have a lot more fun in the future." She slipped past him and ran, stumbling a little, down the dark stairway.

But in her cabin she threw herself on her narrow bunk and fought no longer against the scalding tears that struggled for escape. "Ken! Oh, Ken," she murmured at intervals in a sobbing whisper.

His image tortured her; it was so dear. She remembered the ripple of wave in his bronze-brown hair, the flecks of gold in his nice gray eyes, and the cleft in his square chin.

"How could you misunderstand me so?" she moaned pitifully.

Such a short time ago, she had been light-hearted about her problem. She had been trying to decide between two men. And now—she had lost both of them!

NORA sat up suddenly. Miss Thatcher would be coming in soon. She must be in bed, with the covers for a friendly shield when

that happened. Swiftly she undressed, automatically hanging away the despised chiffon, leaving the cabin tidy. She crept into bed and closed her eyes, to see again that clear image of Kenneth Blakeslee printed on her eyelids.

She heard Miss Thatcher turn the doorknob. Hastily she tucked one little hand under one round cheek. Her long black lashes veiled her wet eyes. She must seem to be asleep.

But Thelma Thatcher was no respecter of another's slumber. She came in with a staccato clatter of spiked heels. She banged the wardrobe door. She tossed clothes here and there. She rattled bottles and jars. And when she was quite sure that Nora was awake she spoke. Her voice was like splintering ice, but her eyes were gloating, content, as they read the traces of recent tears on the girl's wan little face.

"Sulking again, Nora?" she said. "Come! You'll have to do better than this. That is, if it means anything to you to please me."

Nora knew that it meant a great deal, and she trembled at the hint of threat in that last phrase.

"I'm sorry," she said gently. "I didn't mean to sulk."

"Then you'd better mean not to!" Miss Thatcher replied shortly. "I can't be bothered with a grumpy, love sick girl."

The next day a pale and subdued little Nora tried valiantly to relegate her troubles to the background of her mind. She did the packing for both Miss Thatcher and herself. Went here and there on various foolish and unnecessary errands at that lady's bidding. And all the time she managed to keep at least a semblance of cheerfulness.

At last she stood by the rail, an appealing figure beside her employer's determined importance. She peered down at the busy little tugs that were nosing the huge liner into her slip. That dingy, bare-looking shed, impressive for its size only, was her way into France. It didn't seem possible.

Insensibly her spirits lifted. The excitement of landing was contagious. In a few hours she would be in Paris.

Once on the boat-train she sat close to her window, opposite Miss Thatcher, who turned bored eyes from the landscape to read *L'Illustration*. Nora watched, delighted, the stretches of fertile meadow land, the sturdy farmhouses with their screens of soaring poplar trees. She loved the awkward peasants, with their rosy cheeks and quaint blue smocks. This was Normandy, the Normandy of apple blossoms, of happy living and gay song. And she was really in it. She could not, *would* not think of anything else.

And when a honking taxi catapulted them from the station across an evening Paris, she was able to give at least half her mind to the blurred picture of a city of low, massive buildings and wide, graveled squares, lit by the unearthly light of a pale, setting sun.

But after the first thrill of settling in a French hotel, eating a meal prepared by the skillful hands of a real Parisian chef, she discovered that she had exhausted her capacities for enjoying Paris, unless—

But there was no unless. She was sure of that during the next three days, as she went with Miss Thatcher from the salons of smart couturières to the dingy lofts of remote wholesalers. She saw dresses that a week before would have made her breathless with jealous awe. But now they were only bits of cloth that some one had bothered to sew together. And the

glittering shops of the Rue de Rivoli and the Avenue de l'Opera that would have dazzled her once with their treasures gathered from all over the world, she did not see at all.

ON the afternoon of the third day she paced restlessly in her tiny room at the top of the hotel. Her tortured mind was going over and over the last sentences that she and Ken Blakeslee had spoken to each other. She had not seen him again, on the boat, and now she would never see him at all. She was quite sure of that. Her wretched misery was increasing with every barren hour. She had really thought that she could throw herself into her work and forget, with the charms of Paris to assist her. But she had been grievously mistaken.

The walls of the room seemed to be closing in on her, imprisoning her with her unhappiness. She decided abruptly to take a walk. The afternoon was hers. Miss Thatcher had gone out with some boat acquaintances. And anything would be better than staying here, blaming herself for the way her foolish indecision had dashed all her hopes to the ground. For the way she had let her pride seal Ken's belief in her unworthiness.

She threw on her coat, stopped for just a second to adjust her hat, and then ran down the long flights of stairs to the sun-dappled street without. She did not see the gay flower stalls, full to overflowing with the bright blossoms of early spring. She did not notice that the day was very soft and balmy for February, nor heed the gentle breeze that touched her cheek with a promise of other, warmer days to come. She was lost in a world where everything was bleak and cold.

A sudden raucous honking penetrated her consciousness dimly, and after it wild shouts and cries of warning. Automatically she stopped short, but she was too late. A big red car was bearing down on her like a mad devouring beast. She stood helpless in the middle of the street, unable to think or move. She saw the face of the driver for a moment, a face twisted with fear. Then the car swerved, tried to run around her.

But there was no time. A slanting blow from the fender knocked her sideways and she fell. She knew a sickening impact as her head struck something hard. After that there was darkness, pain-filled.

WHEN Nora opened dazed blue eyes she found that she was in a golden room. Her wondering gaze traveled past gilded Louis XV chairs, upholstered in the same yellow brocade that paneled the walls, and came to the foot of that matching sofa where she was lying. What she saw there completed her mystification.

Andrew Michelet, immaculate in dark serge with a gardenia in his buttonhole!

He was watching her with quizzical dark eyes, and when he saw that she was conscious he smiled at her, a warmly reassuring smile.

"What— How—" Nora tried to sit up, but the pain in her throbbing head made her glad to drop back on the soft pillows.

"Careful, little Nora!" he said soothingly. "You got a nasty bump." He slipped from the arm of the couch and came to stand over her. "You're all right, really. But you mustn't try to talk. I'm going to give you some aspirin, and then I'll tell you how you got here."

Nora obediently swallowed the little white pellets he brought her, and took a few sips of water.

"It was a red car," she said suddenly. "I didn't see it until it was right on top of me."

"You certainly didn't." Andrew laughed wryly. "I was half a block away when you stepped off into the street, and I didn't think you had a chance in the world. I was on my way to your hotel when I saw you come rushing out of the door. I followed you, intending to overtake you. I wish I'd hurried a little more. As it was I got there in time to snatch you away from a truck that was coming from the other direction. But I might have saved you from the whole business."

"Then—you saved my life?" Nora got the words out with difficulty. She didn't want to owe anything to this man, to have to be grateful to him.

"Oh, well," Andrew minimized his action with a little shrug. "If I hadn't, somebody else would," he said lightly.

"But *you* did," Nora insisted. She must get through this somehow. And get away as soon as her head would let her move. "I don't know how to thank you."

"Don't you, my dear?" He pulled a chair close to the sofa. "Then I'll tell you. You can let me be your friend."

"But—" Nora began.

"Wait. I know what you are thinking. I *was* a brute the other night on the boat. I didn't understand you—then. And you've got to admit, Nora, that you weren't exactly cold to me at first. I really thought that you were playing a game with me, wanted me to make love to you." He paused for a smile, half chiding, half caressing.

"I should have known better, you being you. When you showed me how wrong I was I suppose my vanity was wounded. But I haven't been able to forget you, little Nora of the blue, blue eyes. Your shy, sweet face has haunted me ever since.

"This afternoon I was on my way to try to make my peace with you when it all happened. Come, won't you call quits, and take me for a friend? I won't repeat my mistake, I assure you."

Nora looked at him, trying to read his lean, brown face; trying to test the direct look of his deep-set, penetrating eyes. He did look sincere, and kind. Impulsively she put out a hand to his eager clasp.

"I will be friends with you, if you want me to," she said shyly. "I guess I was partly to blame. Anyway, what you've done for me since more than wipes it out."

"Good!" Andrew jumped to his feet. "Now you must let me cement our friendship with a little dinner." He moved toward the house telephone, but Nora stopped him with a sudden startled cry.

"Dinner? What time is it? It's so light, I didn't think—"

"It's after seven," he smiled at her. "What difference does it make?"

"A lot." Nora struggled to a sitting position. "Miss Thatcher has made a rule that I must be at the hotel by six every night, unless I'm with her."

"But she can't scold you when you've had an accident."

"I think she can," Nora spoke slowly. Her head was still throbbing painfully. The room danced before her eyes for a moment, merged to a golden haze of wall and hanging. "Andrew!" she went on abruptly, in a different

voice. "Where are we? What place is this?"

"My sitting room at the Ritz. I put you in a taxi and brought you here. I had to get you away quick before the police got their hands on you. You can be arrested in Paris for getting in the way of a car, you know."

Nora sighed, a little moaning whisper of a sigh. "Oh dear," she said miserably. "That makes it a lot worse."

"Why?" Andrew smiled at her quizzically. "Surely you aren't Victorian enough to think that being in a private sitting room is compromising, under the circumstances?"

"No, I'm not," Nora assured him, rather shortly. "But—" she stopped. Even though she hated Miss Thatcher, she couldn't give her away. It would be mean to let Andrew know that the older woman wanted his dark, glowing looks for herself. That she would be furiously jealous.

She got unsteadily to her feet. "Don't think I'm not grateful," she said. "I am, awfully. And I'm going to ask you to do something else for me. Can you get me out of here quietly, right away? I've a good reason for not wanting any one to know I've been in your suite."

"Of course I can," Andrew assured her. "If you think you really must go. There's a lift at the back. It isn't used often. We'll go down in that."

Nora smiled at him gratefully over her shoulder as she slipped her arms into the coat he was holding for her. "Thank you," she said simply.

BUT when the elevator door slid back and she stepped into a comparatively deserted bit of the lobby, she knew that she had made a dreadful mistake. Any one seeing them come out of this little-used back elevator would certainly think that she had been having a clandestine meeting with Andrew. And there were two people, at least, who saw.

Her hands were icy cold as she clasped her little silk bag tightly to try to hide their trembling. Ken! Of all the people in Paris, it would have to be Ken standing not ten feet from the lift when she got off with Andrew. She hardly noticed that his companion was the fat Mrs. Otterby, whom Andrew had seemed to like so much on the boat.

Now she would never in the world be able to explain to Ken. And she realized with the suffocating beat of her heart and the horror that was sweeping over her in waves that in spite of herself she had hoped—hoped desperately that some day she would be able to make him understand.

Well, there was nothing to do now but carry it off as best she could. Her little head lifted proudly. She forced tremulous lips to a smile as she passed the tall boy who was staring at her with sick disgust in his eyes.

"Hello—Ken," she murmured, and went past without waiting for the reply he might not make.

She felt Andrew's hand tighten convulsively on her arm. Vaguely Nora thought that it was nice of him to be sympathetic about her plight. He couldn't know about her feeling for Ken, but he knew that she didn't want to be seen, and apparently he was trying to comfort her for the mischance of this meeting. But it couldn't really matter to her now that this man cared about what happened to her. Listlessly she let him put her into a taxi.

"You've been awfully kind," she told him in a flat little voice.

But Andrew did not seem to be

listening. "You're all right now, aren't you?" he asked. In a more discerning mood Nora might have seen that he was perfunctory, impatient even.

"Quite all right, thanks to you," she said, forcing a smile.

Andrew's nod was brisk, as he stepped back. "I'll call you up to-morrow," and then to the driver, "Hotel Passy-Printemps, and be quick about it!"

When Nora reached the door of her room she paused for a frightened minute. If only Miss Thatcher hadn't come in. She was so tired, and her head still ached wretchedly. She didn't want to have to explain, and be doubted and explain again. It was so exhausting, listening to the tirades of the older woman and never daring to venture more than the gentlest retort.

But luck was against her that night. She saw at a glance that the communicating door between their rooms was open, and standing framed in the doorway was her employer, her face a livid mask of rage.

"Well! So you finally decided to come back!" Thelma Thatcher spat out at her.

"It isn't very late, Miss Thatcher," Nora faltered, amazed. She had expected to be scolded, but she could not understand this violent anger. "I—"

"Don't trouble to tell me your pretty little lies," Miss Thatcher interrupted sarcastically. "There are telephones, you know. I've heard the truth already. You're fired, miss. Only decent girls can work for Merlin, and for me. Oh, you can sleep here to-night," as Nora made a hopeless move toward the door, "but see that you get out early. I don't want to set eyes on your deceitful face again. Here's your money."

She threw a crumpled wad of notes on the floor at the horrified girl's feet and vanished into her own room with a vicious slam of the door.

Nora sank into a chair. Her world was a chaos of broken hopes and her tired, aching head could not sort her troubles nor clarify their magnitude. Over and over again she whispered to herself, "Ken, Ken, how could you do that to me?"

For it was not the insult of Miss Thatcher's words, not the fact that she was alone and jobless in a strange city that made her heart twist and throb with pain. It was the knowledge that the man she loved not only believed this horrible thing about her, but had run at the first moment to tell her employer. He must have known what would happen to her, must have wanted it to happen. Then—then Ken hated her. That was the only explanation.

Pride came to her aid, drying the tears that had been slipping down her hot cheeks. She mustn't love a man who hated her. She couldn't. But her tragic eyes denied her thought as she got slowly to her feet. For she knew, really, that as long as she lived she would love Ken Blakeslee, whatever he might do to her.

Anyway, no one else need know. She'd go to-night. None of them would ever see her again.

And with the decision she was at once frantic with haste to make it an accomplished fact. Feverishly she jerked her suitcase out from under the bed, stuffed her clothes into it anyhow. Jobs might be scarce in Paris, but she'd get one, she told herself savagely. Get one and earn her way home from this country that had given her nothing but misery in return for her loving dreams about it.

But as she stood for a moment irresolute in the corridor she knew a sudden premonitory pang of sheer terror. She was so utterly alone, in Paris, and in the world.

THE dingy little hotel in which she had finally found refuge that night had a dark stairwell that smelled always of yellow soap. But Nora, climbing the steep flights to her tiny cubicle under the eaves, was too grateful to complain. How long would she have even this shelter that was clean and dry and warm?

A week had passed, seven wretched, fruitless days. She had been to countless stores and offices. She had been snubbed and shunted about from person to person. But although she bore whatever indignity came her way with patience, she had not been able to wrest even the promise of work from any one. And her precious hoard of francs had shrunk astoundingly.

She quickened her footsteps on the last flight. That dark little room was home, a haven of rest and peace after the strange terror of her day. But when she opened the door she discovered that her room was not empty. The *concierge*, a fat woman whose masculine lip was lined with a dark mustache, glowered at her.

"The rent, *mademoiselle*. I have come for the rent!" she said in her hard, rasping voice. "*Mademoiselle* knows that we are poor. We have children. We must eat." A big red arm lifted ominously from beneath her greasy shawl. "The rent, or *mademoiselle* must give up this room to-night."

"But—I can't pay you now," Nora faltered. "I—it's only due to-day. To-morrow—I—"

"To-morrow! You come to me in the middle of the night and I take you in out of the kindness of my heart. I do not demand a sou in advance. And when I ask for the money that is due you say 'To-morrow!'" she mimicked a travesty of Nora's soft voice. "To-night! You go out on the streets where I might have supposed you belong, *mademoiselle*, unless you pay to-night!"

Nora stared at her. There was a sinister note in her last words. The girl had a sudden feeling that this dreadful woman was suggesting a way that the money might be earned. Her flesh crawled with disgust as she picked up her purse.

"I will not come back unless I have the money," she said evenly. "And it will not be to stay if I do. Have no fear of that, *madame*."

She went slowly down the stairs. She would have to go to Andrew Michelet. He was the only friend she had in Paris. And he might be able to help her find work. She had thought of asking him once or twice, but she had hated dreadfully to do it. However unintentionally, he had been the cause of all her troubles, and just the saying of his name to herself was enough to bring the hot stinging tears to her eyelids. It would have been better, she thought, if he had let that truck finish its destruction, instead of saving her as he had.

There was a telephone in the lower hall. She went to it and, in a voice that trembled, gave the number of the Ritz. If only Ken— But she would not let herself go on with that thought. It hurt too much.

ANDREW was in, she learned. And in a moment she heard his voice, eager and affectionate.

"Nora, my dear! Is it really you?

I've been worried about you. I can't tell you! Where are you, child?"

"I—never mind." Nora spoke in a breathless stutter. "I—I want to see you, Andrew. To ask you something."

"Dine with me then," he offered quickly. "Here, or anywhere you like."

"Not there," Nora objected, with a shiver of remembrance. "But if you know a little restaurant, a quiet one, I—I'd love to."

"The Poisson d'Or. Just the place. It's on the left bank. The Rue Bonaparte, near the river. Do you think you can find it? I'll be there in ten minutes." He really did sound glad to hear from her, Nora thought.

"That must be very near here," she said. "Of course I can find it. I can be there in ten minutes, too."

She stretched the few blocks between her hotel and the restaurant by taking a roundabout way, and when she got there Andrew was waiting just inside the door.

He caught both her little hands close in his strong brown ones. His eyes were dancing with surprised pleasure.

"Nora! Dear little girl! Do you know you've given me a bad week?"

"Did I?" Nora asked. "I—I didn't mean to. I just didn't want to see any one after—"

"I know." His voice was warmly sympathetic. "That—that—well, it's no good calling her names. Miss Thatcher told me when I phoned that she had discharged you, and why. It was an outrage, and I'm glad to say I told her as much. But she didn't seem impressed."

"She wouldn't," said Nora with a bitterness that was incongruous coming from her soft, childish lips. "But let's not talk about her."

"We're not going to talk about anything much until we've had something to eat. I can see that you've suffered, Nora. And I want to know all about it. But first—" Gently he urged her toward the back of the quiet little restaurant.

Nora sank gratefully onto a padded bench and faced Andrew across a narrow table for two. They were shut in by the high backs of their seats, brought close together in a little world of their own, a cozy world, fragrant with the perfume of a bouquet of spring flowers and with the delicious steam from a bowl of smoking hot soup that an attentive waiter was placing between them.

"I like this place," said Andrew in a matter-of-fact voice. "They don't bother asking you what you want. They produce, like magicians, the most delicious food in Paris and set it temptingly before you." He lifted the big silver ladle and filled a generous soup plate for her.

Nora was grateful for his tact, but she could find no inconsequential chatter with which to meet it. Her trouble weighed too heavily for that. But apparently Andrew did not expect her to. He went on talking casually until the waiter had left them to themselves, and then his voice slipped from the impersonal note to one of intimate concern.

"Now, dear child," he said softly, "what is worrying you so?"

"Andrew," Nora spoke with grave simplicity, "I'm in dreadful trouble and I've got to ask your help."

"You know I—" Andrew broke off abruptly to stare across the room. For a moment his face became an enigmatic mask. His eyes held a strange glint as they came slowly back to Nora.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing, my dear. I thought for a moment I knew that man in the corner. Tell me—how can I help you? You must know that I'd do anything—for you."

"It's about a job," Nora said in a rush. "You know Miss Thatcher fired me. I've been trying ever since to find work and I can't. Now I've been put out of my room because I can't pay the rent. And I don't know what to do." Her voice quivered and almost broke, but she forced herself to finish calmly. "I thought perhaps you could help me to find a job, anything at all, just so I can earn enough to get home."

TO her astonishment, Andrew broke into a low peal of laughter. "Don't be hurt, dear," he said hastily. "I couldn't help laughing, with relief. I didn't know what might have happened to you. And then you only want a job—when I've been hunting for you frantically just so I could offer you one."

Nora smiled doubtfully. "You're just saying that," she said gently. "You want to make it easy for me."

"Listen to me, child!" Andrew spoke quickly. "You know I like you, to put it mildly. I wouldn't care so much what happens to you if I didn't. But when it comes to my work I don't go by liking alone. Ever since I met you I've been studying you with an eye to your having a part in it. And I can prove it. Back on the boat, you may remember, I asked you if you liked Miss Thatcher, and when you said you didn't I went on to ask you why you stayed with her. I was thinking, even then, that you might be willing to come into my organization."

"But — but —" Nora stuttered, amazed. "You never—"

"No, I didn't go on with it. I wasn't sure that there would be a place for you, for one thing. And I had to know you better. You see, mine is a position of trust. The work I do is secret, and I must have subordinates I can trust implicitly, who trust me and do as I tell them without asking questions. For I would be breaking faith if I answered those questions."

Nora's blue eyes were wide with excited interest. "Has your work anything to do with the government?" she asked before she could stop herself.

Andrew smiled at her, gently chiding. "Yes, it has," he said. "But that is all I can tell you."

Thrilled color rushed into Nora's soft cheeks. She had been right about this man. He was important. One of those who do things.

"I won't ask you anything else;" she said. "And I'd love to work for you."

"Good!" Andrew's voice was hearty with approval. "I'm going to ask you to begin to-night. There's a packet I must deliver to a certain man. I'm afraid I'm being watched. So I'm going to slip it to you under the table. There'll be an envelope with it, with your instructions and enough money to pay for your room and expenses. When we leave here I shall take you home and say good night. After that I want you to carry on like the good little soldier I know you are."

Nora nodded. His belief in her made her feel capable of performing miracles in the most dangerous and difficult circumstances. She would show him that his trust was not misplaced.

Idly she allowed her hands to drop into her lap and in a moment they closed over the packet Andrew had described. She smiled at him as she opened her bag and took out her

powder compact. When she returned the little gilt disk the packet Andrew had given her went in with it, and she was rewarded for her ingenuity by a quick smile of approbation.

"And now, my dear," said Andrew, "we'd better be running along. I know you're tired." His voice had changed and Nora knew, without the warning look in his dark eyes, that enough had been risked in conversation and that the game had begun.

"Thanks for a lovely dinner," she said politely as she rose. "It's been nice to see you again."

As they came out into the misty Paris evening she stopped for a second, startled. A man had vanished around the nearest corner, but just before he disappeared she thought she recognized Ken Blakeslee. All the relief of finding a way out of her difficulties and all the excitement of the way itself faded as the pain of one trouble that would never be eased set her heart to beating violently.

"What is it?" Andrew asked her quickly.

"Nothing, nothing at all." Nora straightened small shoulders. Ken wasn't worth her love. She must stop thinking about him, stop imagining that she saw him in every chance passer-by. Even if he hadn't done so much to hurt her he was nothing but a lazy boy, and at her side was a man.

She smiled up at Andrew as he piloted her gently along the slippery pavement. "I was just surprised to find it was raining," she said.

AN hour later Nora crept silently down the long, dark stairs of her hotel. Her face was white as paper, and her eyes were blazing with excitement. This was adventure, life—going out into the dark mystery of a Paris night on an important secret mission.

She found a cruising taxi on the Quai and stopped for a whispered instruction to the driver before she slipped inside. The cab started with a grinding of gears, gathered speed and shot through strange, glistening streets. When it finally skidded to an abrupt stop she found herself in a narrow, dirty alley. Bulging old buildings towered and almost met above her head.

A cramped little store was just opposite her, its streaked windows glowing with yellow light against the fog. A crazy sign hung askew above the door:

AU DIAMANT BLEU

Marcel Latranche, Prop.

She glanced again at the paper in her hand. That much was right. Suddenly a strange and almost overpowering fear surged up in her. She must conquer it, she told herself, she must! She was here to obey orders.

But, in spite of her resolve, the steps that carried her over the threshold of the tiny, dingy shop were slow and faltering. Deep inside of her a warning was sounding.

And when a bell jangled loudly as she closed the door behind her, Nora started with terror and then laughed at her own silliness. At the summons an incredibly aged man appeared like magic behind the battered counter.

He was a terrible old man, she thought. His eyes were like glittering black beads, malevolent and leering as he peered at her. His head was covered with a skull cap, once black, but now faded to a moldy green. A long gray beard, greasy and uncombed, covered his mouth and billowed down over his spotted coat front.

"M. Latranche?" Nora asked doubtfully, almost in a whisper.

The old man rubbed his hands together knowingly. "The same," he said in a squeaky voice. "And what can I do for *mademoiselle?*"

"I—I have a packet for you, from—from André," she faltered, remembering her instructions. This was awful.

"Oh-h-o-o-o," he cackled. "So that's the way of it! Give me the packet then, little cabbage," and he chuckled horribly.

Nora held out a trembling hand and a dirty claw snatched at the package.

"Jules!" he called. "Come here, Jules!"

A younger, less oily replica of the old man popped out of the back room. His son, she thought, and just as nasty looking, as she saw the gleam that shot from the second pair of beady black eyes as they rested on her.

She mustn't let them see how she was trembling. Casually she retreated a few steps, turned slightly toward the door. To her astonishment, she saw that it was open a tiny crack, was opening more and more, very slowly and silently. She was quite sure that the two men did not know. They were bending over the counter, their heads close together, and they were whispering rapidly in French.

She must warn them that some one was coming, secretly. Had she been followed? She hadn't thought so, but she must have been. As she opened her lips to speak, M. Latranche raised his voice and she heard a sentence. Apparently they did not dream she knew their language, for what she heard was:

"The little fool doesn't know she's a go-between. She thinks," again that dreadful chuckle, "she thinks these pearls of the fat Mme. Otterby are diplomatic papers! Black André knows how to pick his girls. Dumb and useful."

Nora's breath stopped.

While the sound of the old man's words still hung in the air she knew a moment of blinding revelation. Little searchlights of memory were playing on scarce noted details of the past. She saw a sleek dark head bending over one that was marcelled and gray. She saw a lustrous, milky strand of pearls twisted three times around the plump neck below that gray hair, and, for the first time, she saw covetous greed in the black eyes that were so attentive to a fat old woman.

Black André—Andrew Michelet. He was a thief. A jewel thief. That first uncertain doubt that she had felt about him had been instinct trying to warn her. But she had stifled it, and although he had revealed his true character that night on the boat, she had let herself be wooed back to trust in him. Because he had saved her life she had buried her anger. And now—now he had used her, smirched her honesty as he had probably intended all the time. She had been a fool, a silly, impressionable fool.

All this passed through her mind in a flash. And then she was electrified to action. It might not be too late to undo at least part of her folly.

QUICK as lightning Nora's hand shot out. Before the two men could realize her intention she had snatched up the pearls and clutched them to her.

"I do know!" she cried. "I know more than you think. These pearls are stolen! You can't have them! You can't! I'm going to give them back!"

With amazing agility the old man

was over the counter, even before his son. He twisted her arm cruelly, bending it back until her fingers opened automatically from the pain. The pearls dropped to the floor. But before he could stoop to retrieve his loot the door swung wide and the little shop was choked with people.

Wiry, capable men in the blue capes and visored caps of the Paris police caught and held the fence and his son. Writhe and curse as they might, there was no escape.

A gray-haired man without a uniform seized Nora's arm and held it in a vise-like grip. He made her a low, ironic bow and smiled sardonically.

"Well done, *mademoiselle!* If I had not seen you myself, looking at the door, I might have believed that you did not know these pearls were stolen. A pretty case of *sauve qui peut!* The *petite Americaine* is clever!"

Nora shuddered with ghastly, enveloping dread. The unreasoning fear that had begun in the street outside the shop was nothing to the mounting terror that took possession of her now. She had been caught in a sinister web and the meshes were getting tighter and tighter about her.

"Come!" the man at her side gave her a callous push that almost sent her off her feet. "The police station first, and then a nice warm cell for *mademoiselle,*" he finished sarcastically. "You'll like that, perhaps, on this wet night!"

The big dingy room at the station house was lit by a single powerful bulb that swung on a cord from the center of the ceiling. Nora cowered beneath it, her back to a table. The pitiless rays lit her frightened face to exaggerated pallor.

The same tall man who had sneered at her in the shop loomed over her and showered her with words that were like hard little pellets of hail.

"I will be frank," he said. "I will tell you what we know and then you will tell me—several things. First, you knew Black André in America, knew him very well indeed." He smiled knowingly. "You arranged to take the boat with him, but you were to pretend to meet him on it for the first time.

"In Paris you were to be just a casual acquaintance, ready to take the pearls when necessary and avoid suspicion for both of you. But you made one bad mistake, *mademoiselle.* You should not have let sentiment get the better of your business sense. It was folly to let yourself have that little idyl in his rooms at the Ritz. Before that we were suspicious of you—but after that we knew!"

Nora stared at him, astounded. The deft mixture of fact and fiction in his words almost made her feel that what he said was the truth. "I *was* at the Ritz," she said slowly, trying to force her dazed wits along the one way that might mean salvation. "But since you know about that you must know about the accident, too."

"Accident?" her tormentor raised ironic eyebrows. "No. Some day I would like to hear all your little fairy tales, but now—I'm busy."

"Oh!" Nora cried out piteously. "I can never make you believe me, but I wasn't acting in the shop. I didn't even know there were pearls in that package. I did meet Andrew Michelet on the boat for the first time, and when I went to his rooms he took me there unconscious. I had been knocked down in the street by an automobile. I lost my job because of being there. My employer thought—what you do. And I couldn't find another. Andrew—Mr.

Michelet, whatever his real name is, told me he was in secret service and that I could work for him."

The tall man laughed shortly. "Really, *mademoiselle*, you amuse me. You are *une vraie comédienne!* If you had been in an accident who would know it better than the police? It is true you left your job and pretended to hunt for work."

Pretended! Nora shivered.

"You were really waiting for Black André to get the pearls. This evening you dined with him at Le Poisson d'Or, and took the pearls to deliver to Latranche. We wanted to get all of you, and so we waited."

He paused. His eyes bored into hers. His grip tightened on her arm until she had to bite her lips to keep from screaming with the pain.

"Where is André?" the man asked sternly, insistently. "Where is he? He gave us the slip and we've got to find him."

"I don't know," Nora sobbed. "I don't know!"

"Come, *mademoiselle*." The mocking courtesy of his voice made her writhe. "That will not do. We will have to—"

Before he could finish the door burst open and a wild-eyed, dishevelled young man rushed up to her. It was Ken, sent for, she supposed, to add his damning evidence of the boat and that afternoon at the Ritz. She stared wretchedly at his rain-spattered hair.

He's forgotten his hat, she thought idiotically. He'll catch cold!

She could not meet his eyes, could not open her quivering lips for speech. She waited, trembling, for his first accusing words. But there was only anxious fear in the voice that said:

"Nora! Nora, darling! I'm going to get you out of this!" He turned quickly to the detective. "Let go her arm!" he commanded brusquely. "She isn't guilty."

"No?" The man's eyes were skeptical, but he dropped his hand. "You were not so sure of that, *monsieur*—before."

NORA stared from one man to the other. What was Ken doing here? How could he issue orders to a French detective and have them obeyed? The problem was too much for her, and she waited, still dazed, for what might follow.

"I can prove it now!" Ken was emphatic. "These just came from New York. I've been decoding them. That's why I'm so late. Read them." He handed him a thin sheaf of blue cablegram sheets. "Read them aloud! You owe Miss Shayne that much."

And slowly the detective read:

> Holding accomplice André Michelet. Was arrested under alias before he sailed. Just got her story.
>
> Signed, MARTIN.

The Frenchman laid down one sheet and turned with maddening slowness to the next as he murmured dryly, "There might be two girls."

The second message was longer.

> Letter from Michelet intercepted at girl's room. Part you want as follows: "She's a pretty little fool, Gracie, and I think I can use her. She's not one of us, but perhaps that is for the best. I shan't tell her anything. An honest maiden who will fall for my *beaux yeux*—and she will—may be better here than you could be for all your cleverness. And if we get caught I can leave her holding the bag, which I couldn't do with you. You needn't worry, you see. I may kiss the little Shayne, but it will be in the line of business. My real kisses are all for you."

Woman Gracie confirms this. She is jealous and talking a blue streak. Keep me advised.

Signed MARTIN.

Nora heard herself sigh, a long breath of relief, but nothing seemed real. The room was whirling about her and she swayed against Ken. A strong arm went around her, held her firmly. And strength flowed back into her again. Ken was there, and, miraculously, he was her protector.

Vaguely she heard the detective say, "Then she wasn't acting in Latranche's shop. The risk she took there, standing up to those men, deserves praise. But what about the business at the Ritz, and this accident she talks about? There wasn't any."

"But there was." This new Ken talked with crisp directness. "Look up your record for February 21. You'll find there was a mix-up on the Rue de Rennes. A girl was reported knocked unconscious, but she disappeared. The driver of the car told me that a man who answers Michelet's description got her into a cab and rushed her off before the police could get there. Of course he took her to his rooms."

"Well—" the detective shrugged. "I apologize to *mademoiselle*. And now I must get after Michelet."

"Oh," said Ken casually, "I forgot to tell you. We got him. Dupont has him in charge now. So that's all right."

"You forgot to tell me—" repeated the astounded Frenchman, and broke off to stare at Ken. But as he recognized the look on the boyish face that was bending solicitously above Nora a slow smile of comprehension dawned in his eyes and spread to his stern mouth. "*C'est entendu, monsieur!*" he said. "I will ask Dupont about that!" And waved them toward the door with a gesture surprisingly tolerant of youth and love.

For the few moments that it took them to reach the street Nora rejoiced in the touch of Ken's hand on her arm, loved the protecting nearness of him. But she could not really forget that this tall boy, who was so dear, had misjudged her before he had come with sure competence to save her. And all the swift events just past, the danger and terror she had known, faded to nothing beside the pain of a remembered look in his gray eyes. He was only being decent to her, now, she thought. Feeling sorry for her, that was all.

And with that pride came to her aid. She must get away before he saw how much he meant to her, how much, how terribly much she loved him.

"I—I can't thank you enough," she said quickly. "I—you saved me from— Oh, I do thank you, anyway. Good-by."

BUT Kenneth had his own ideas. He caught both her small fluttering hands and held them close.

"Nora, dearest, dearest Nora!" he cried. "You can't leave me now. You've got to forgive me first."

"Forgive you?" Nora tried to speak casually, but her voice shook. "Forgive you for what?"

"For misjudging you so, my darling. I don't know how I could. How for one minute I could have believed you were anything but sweet and true and fine."

"You believed it for more than a minute, didn't you?" Nora asked wearily.

"Not really." Ken's ardent young voice was persuasive. "What I saw on the boat was a terrible shock to me. I wanted to ask you to marry me that

night. I hadn't an idea you were with Michelet when I followed him up to the boat deck. And when I saw you in his arms, passive, accepting his kiss—"

"But I did struggle," Nora interpolated swiftly, "only it didn't do any good. And I had to pretend to like it in order to get away."

She looked at him pleadingly.

"You fooled me, too." Ken's voice was very low. "And I—I guess I went mad for a while."

"But why were you following him?" Nora changed the subject suddenly. "I don't understand."

"Part of my job. I was on the ship because he was. I'm a detective, darling."

"You don't look like one." Nora's eyes widened with delighted comprehension. "I never dreamed—"

"No. I hope I don't. It's good business not to. I try to look like a downy lad just out of college. One who finds his brains too new to use." He laughed at her tenderly. "Did I fool you?"

"Yes, you did. That was why I—I mean, I like men who do things, and I thought—"

"Will you forgive me, sweetheart?" Ken persisted. "For being such a bum detective. I should have known that you were, well—you. Perfect. But I was jealous. When I came to my senses the next day I could have kicked myself. And Michelet kept me too busy to tell you so."

"But—" a sickening memory had come back to Nora. "In the Ritz, that day, you looked—disgusted. You believed that I—"

"I didn't!" Ken denied swiftly. "I was scared stiff about you. I knew how carefully Michelet was being watched, and I was afraid of just what did happen. That you would get mixed up in his dirty work without knowing what it was. The disgust was there. But it was for myself, for letting him see me with Mrs. Otterby. I was trying to warn her without seeming to. I couldn't give my position away. But I was sure he was after her pearls."

"Oh," said Nora.

"But I couldn't do anything with her. She was crazy about him. And when I tried to get hold of you, to warn you, too, I learned that she had phoned Miss Thatcher right after she left me, and that you had been fired and had disappeared. I was in a panic, I can tell you.

"For I not only had to worry about you, but I had to prove that you were innocent of any connection with that crook. He was known to have an American girl for an accomplice, and of course the police were sure to pick on you."

Nora nodded slowly. If he had made one mistake about her, she had made a hundred about him. She hadn't been able to trust him at all. She to blame him!

"So I started cabling to New York, hoping for a lead," Ken went on. "And I set to work here to find out how you came to be at the Ritz with him. You see, I knew that even though you might be in love with him, you would have a good reason for being in his apartment."

"Oh," said Nora softly, and again, "Oh." She studied the toes of her small shoes. "I was an awful little fool. But—but I never really liked Andrew Michelet. I was just dazzled for a little while, I guess. When you kissed me—"

"Nora, you darling! Then you do forgive me?"

Nora looked up at him and her shy

blue eyes were wet. "If you forgive me," she murmured, "for thinking the things I did about you."

He caught her hand.

"Let's forget it all!" Ken laughed headily. "Let's go and do what you most want to do in all Paris. Tell me, what would that be?"

The dimple that Ken loved appeared in her soft cheek.

"You—you'll think I'm awfully silly," she whispered.

"Never!" and the pressure of his strong hands on her fingers emphasized the word.

"Well—" she began; and then, "You won't laugh?"

"I couldn't laugh at you, ever."

"I've always wanted to sit and drink coffee at one of those little tables on the Champs Elysées, under the chestnut trees," she said.

PASSERS-BY may have given wondering looks at a small girl in thin blue coat and straw cloche, sitting beside a tall boy whose wet hair glistened in the diffused glow of an arc light. They may have speculated as to why these two lingered so long over cold coffee at a little table ill protected by the still leafless chestnut trees. But it did not occur to Ken and Nora that there was anything odd about their being there.

The mist that surrounded them was a friendly curtain. The coffee they forgot to drink was a magic elixir, warm and fragrant and delightful. The chestnut trees bloomed for them alone. Paris—and heaven—was before them.

A little later they walked slowly along the shining pavement, between a double row of tall lights that sent rosy beams of benediction all about them. And presently they turned off on a narrow gravelled path that crossed a deserted square of park.

Ken's arm slipped around the little figure at his side. Gently but surely he drew her to him.

"Nora, my own darling Nora," he said against her soft cheek. "I can't bear to think that I ever—"

But a small white hand was lifted to stop his words. "We were going to forget all that," she told him.

"You — you're marvelous!" he whispered, his wavy bronze-brown head still close to her curly black one.

"Oh, Ken—" was all that she was able to manage.

But they didn't need words, just then. His eager young lips found hers, and clung, as if they had come home at last, in a long, happy kiss.

Time ended for them both. They did not know how long they stood there, close in each other's arms, plighting a wordless, sacred troth. But presently:

"Nora, I can't believe it, sweetheart. That you and I are going to be married. Have a home of our own. Tell me I'm not dreaming, precious little girl. Tell me that you love me."

"I—I love you, Ken," Nora whispered obediently, and tried to hide her radiant flush against his coat. "Only—are you quite sure you want me? I feel like a stray kitten, homeless—not belonging to any one."

One strong hand tilted back her chin. Gray eyes looked into blue.

"Beautiful," he murmured, a world of tenderness in his voice. "Adorable! This is where you belong. Here in my arms forever."

With a little sigh of complete happiness, Nora lifted her face to his kiss. And knew again, with the sweet clinging pressure of his lips, that he was right.

The Cheat

A sweetheart easily won, easily discarded, or a lover strong, swift to punish . . . Which did Janet really love?

By Mona Osborn Kneen

JANET KELLAND was on her way toward a week-end in the country. A cool breeze fanned her face and tugged at the wisps of hair which peeped out shyly from under the brim of her jaunty hat.

The stuffy limousine, with careful Edward at the wheel, had been much too slow for Janet, so she had purchased this sleek roadster.

It was a sweet car, long, low, racy — so much the latter, in fact, that she had found herself in possession of more than one ticket for speeding.

Tickets had never meant much to Janet, however. She handed them over to her father, who in turn handed them on to some other influential person. And, usually that was the last she heard of them.

"You know? You've known all the time?"

But the circumstances surrounding her last ticket hadn't been ordinary. Her father had read an account of them in one of the large dailies, and so had a great many other people. The story had occupied much front-page space, with self-explanatory pictures.

The fact that Janet had narrowly escaped running down an unwary Ford and killing two innocent bystanders, might have influenced Mr. Kelland. After seeing his friend, the judge, he had gone home and informed his daughter that he would "fix" no more tickets. Another one meant that she should serve a well-deserved sentence in jail.

Janet had been properly horrified. A *Kelland* in jail! Her torrent of scandalized protests had only brought forth another solution for the problem.

All right, her father had said, she should stop driving. He'd get himself another chauffeur and she could have Edward in the future. Edward!

So the girl had had to yield to the inevitable. The roadster, without Edward, was hers for this week-end only, on the strength of her sacred promise not to speed.

That was the reason she was creeping along at a snail-like forty, one eye glued on the surely inaccurate speedometer.

Very self-righteous was she. And, it must be admitted, her face, her somewhat sophisticated, lovely-contoured, rather arrogant little face, was far from contented. Never had miles been so long, or driving so irksome. She almost wished she had brought Edward.

Still, she would have reached her destination a law-abiding citizen had it not been for a long, greyhound-like car which chose to dash past and shake its rubber shod heels in her face.

Very few cars had ever shown their heels to Janet's mile-eating roadster. She could fairly see it lift its head and cock a surprised ear at her.

Impulse gave the order. The motor responded with a reassuring roar. Off they flashed after the insulting automobile, and soon passed it triumphantly.

Janet flung one gloved hand straight up in the air, a wave of derision and challenge. Then she idled a bit, openly hopeful.

The driver of the other car grinned and refused the invitation, so she went on, speed mania in full charge again. She eased around a sharp curve, her eyes sparkling with excitement.

The breeze turned into a wind, whipping new color to her cheeks. Her glance flickered down to the speedometer.

Seventy!

Her foot lifted guiltily, but it was too late; the damage was done.

She gasped, panic-stricken, as she looked into the mirror. There it was! Her disastrous ticket, looming ever nearer in the form of a businesslike speed cop!

HER first coherent thoughts were of her father. She had broken her word. *Jail!* Her heart turned clear over.

The hope that she could outrun the motorcycle fathered the act. The roadster leaped forward as though divining her need; she sobbed and gave it the last ounce of gas. They flew. So did the motorcycle, its siren screaming the command to halt.

She slowed down despairingly as the distance between her and her pursuer narrowed, and raised her eyes to the mirror. They lit upon another car. She looked at it miserably, and the

misery changed to startled hope as an idea popped into her brain.

Why not? she asked herself fiercely, why not? It couldn't possibly hurt anything! And it *was* a chance.

Necessity won the argument. She brought the roadster to a jerky stop and crumpled over the wheel as though exhausted. Her shoulders heaved with agonized sobs. Officer Ryan silenced his machine and stared at her, his young face working with a blend of anger, distrust, and bewilderment.

Janet lifted tear-drenched eyes, caught her trembling lip between her teeth and gasped:

"Thank—thank God *you're* here!"

"That," said Officer Ryan, "is the first time any one ever offered thanks for me, sister!"

His hand moved toward his breast pocket; he drew out a pencil. Janet shivered. There was no time to reconsider. It was now or never.

"Oh, officer," she wailed in a terror-choked voice, "a man is following me!"

"What's that?"

"Yes, oh, yes! He's been following me ever since I came through the last town!"

She shuddered realistically. Ryan was impressed.

"The dirty bum!" he growled.

She nodded dumbly and strove to tell the story with her eyes. All that was protective surged up in Officer Ryan's manly young bosom.

"The dirty bum!" he repeated, his tone boding ill for such double-dyed villainy.

His reaction was perfect, but Janet was taking no chances. She wished to make assurance doubly sure. She stood up suddenly, turning about to brace her knees against the seat.

"Here he comes now!" she cried, pointing. Accusation rang strong in her voice, crowded fright to the background.

"That the guy?"

"Yes. But he won't stop!" she assured him hastily.

"I'll *bet* he stops!" Ryan gritted, his jaws tightening.

Janet had a strange sinking sensation; she put her icy finger tips to her eyes. Little fool! To try a stunt like that!

The other car slid to a stop before Ryan's upraised hand. It was the greyhound!

"Well!" Janet blurted, surprised. "You caught me!"

"I certainly did," observed the stranger, wholly unconscious of his danger.

His lips crinkled into an admiring smile. He ignored the stern officer who was listening intently, his thick brows drawn into a scowl. Ryan turned to Janet, who sat down abruptly and twisted her fingers together.

"Want to swear out a warrant?" he asked her.

A warrant! She cast an apprehensive glance at the stranger. He was still staring at her, and not paying a bit of attention to the Law! She seized the opportunity quickly.

"Can't you just keep him—until I get away?" she suggested in a pleading little voice. "*You'd* know exactly what to do and I—I just *couldn't* go into the police court! It would all come out in the papers"—a very real horror tinged her voice—"and I—Oh! that would be *too* terrible!"

The stranger seemed to sense something amiss all at once. He opened his mouth—a rather nice mouth—but Janet raced her motor to drown his voice. She looked into Ryan's eyes—a worshipful, God-bless-you look.

"Oh," she breathed, "you *do* understand!"

"You bet, girlie," he assured her protectingly, not understanding a thing but luckily, not realizing it. "You run along. I'll tend to this bird!"

JANET didn't wait for a second invitation. She gave the car gas with a suddenness that jerked her head backward. But she escaped. And that, after all, was the main thing!

"Well, you!" Ryan barked, striding over to the stranger belligerently. "You back up and turn around. Snap into it!"

The man didn't snap. He just sat, his tanned face more than a little surprised.

"What's the idea?" he demanded.

Ryan glared and gave his thumb a jerk which repeated the order. His grim expression forbade any argument. The stranger appeared inclined to argue, however.

"I'm going to Riverside," he announced, very emphatically. He seemed quite sure of it.

"Oh, no, you're not," Ryan informed him, equally emphatically, equally sure of it.

The stranger jerked his car into gear.

"You," he said crisply, "may go to the deuce!"

"Saaay, listen, fella," Ryan rasped, placing an official number eleven on the running board, "not so fast. Not—so—fast! I think I'll take a look at your driver's license."

The man hesitated, his eyes smoldering.

"I asked for your driver's license! Ain't you got any?"

It was produced with obvious reluctance. Ryan grinned provokingly.

"Anthony Eastham," he wrote, "1228 Las Palmas, Hollywood. All right. Now"—he tapped the pad with heavy significance—"I'm going to turn this in to headquarters. With a *full report.* You'll get the limit if you ever try this stunt again! See?"

"Stunt?" Eastham echoed. "What stunt?"

"Don't pull any of that injured innocence stuff, you cake-eatin' swine!"

Bang went the door. Out sprang Eastham. Ryan gave way a step before his white-faced fury.

"What was that?" he demanded, his fists clenched and threatening.

A dusty Ford roadster chugged to a stop beside them and a grinning young six-footer unwound himself from the wheel.

"Hi, Ryan!" he greeted happily. "Heard your siren. How's chances for a story?"

"Fine, Chick! Glad to see you. This bird's *good* material! Got him chasin' a girl."

Eastham jammed his fists into his pockets and threw back his head, bursting into derisive laughter.

"So that's it!" he exclaimed. "That's a new one! Why, you poor dub—to let her get away with it!"

"Watch your step, Eastham. You don't put that over!"

"Then why didn't she stick around and turn me in?"

"Afraid of the publicity," Ryan said shortly.

Eastham eyed him in fresh amazement.

"And you believed that, too!" he marveled. "Well, I'll—be—darned!"

"You will be before I get through with you," Ryan informed him curtly. "I meant to let you go with a warning, but, by gorry, if you think you're so smart we'll look into this!"

Chick reached into his Ford and drew out his camera.

"Gee, Ryan," he exulted, beginning to set it up, "this sounds like front page stuff! Wait till I get a picture."

"The devil you will!" Eastham cried. Out flashed his foot; down crashed the camera, tripod and all.

Chick cursed him in round numbers as he retrieved it. He wiped away the dust with his handkerchief, and shook out pieces of broken glass, meanwhile telling Eastham things about himself that he, Eastham, had never suspected. Eastham, in—and also out of—turn, mentioned a few of both Chick's and Officer Ryan's shortcomings. Both waxed warmer as the contest continued and a goodly crowd collected.

There is, according to rule, safety in numbers, Eastham being only one, the other two overlooked his objections and offered to escort him stationward. They did it, too.

Some time later he found himself fifty dollars poorer, but well supplied with excellent advice as to his future conduct. And that wasn't all. As he stalked from the room Chick hastened to overtake him.

"Hey! Wait a minute, woman-chaser," he called. "Aren't you forgetting something? How about my camera?"

Only a superhuman effort kept the young man's hands in his pockets. He merely swung on his heel and strode away from temptation. Chick followed him to his car.

"You'll be sorry for this!" he cried. "I'll get even. D'ya hear? I'll get even!" But Eastham only started his motor and roared away.

THE next morning Janet, heavy lidded and heavier spirited, woke to feel that something dreadful was hanging over her. She rang for her breakfast and picked at it listlessly, spooning out a bit of the iced grapefruit and sipping the coffee.

As her maid lifted the tray, she reached out for the newspaper and shook it open carelessly. Then everything in her immediate vicinity went all topsy-turvy.

"Martie!" she cried, horrified. "Martie! *Look!*"

The maid peered down at the pen sketches indicated by the shaking finger.

First, a man-driven automobile streaking after a terrified girl in a roadster. Second, the interfering cop, dashing from his lair to protect the girl. And third, the guilty wretch haled before a sour-visaged justice of the peace.

Martha looked mystified.

"Why, however, does it concern you, Miss Janet?" she asked.

"Oh, Martie, can't you see? That ghastly story! Anthony Eastham—the *playwright!*" She stopped, round-eyed with awe. "It would have to be somebody like that! That *crazy* cop! Oh, whatever shall I *do?*"

"Was he following you?" Martha snapped like a biting turtle, her eyes glittering. She was a large-hearted combination of maid and almost-mother, wrapped into one gaunt package and tied by the strings of love.

"Oh, no, Martie," Janet wailed miserably, "I only wish he *had* been! Then it wouldn't matter. But don't you see? I thought the cop would let him go as soon as I got away!"

She blurted out the whole story; then she crumpled down and buried her shamed head deep in the pillows. Martha patted her soothingly and tried to comfort her.

"Don't, Martie," she cried at last, beating the pillows. "Don't sympathize with me! I'm—I'm just a—a mean, selfish little coward!"

She raised her head and spoke pleadingly.

"Tell me, Martie, what can I do? However can I square myself?"

"You can't," Martha answered, rather severely for her. "You'd better go away for a month or so. No telling what that man might do if he should meet you! He might—well, you'd just better go away," she repeated.

"Run away! Why, that would be cowardly, Martie, and I've had enough of that! No. I'll have to find him, somehow, and try to square myself!"

Martha tried to dissuade her, telling her that she'd just get herself in trouble.

"Stop talking, Martie," Janet commanded at last. "My head's all thick now, and I *must* think. Hand me my book of telephone numbers. Hurry!"

Martha obeyed in injured silence. Janet seized the little book and studied each name carefully. She spent the next half hour calling any one she thought might know Anthony Eastham, but she'd almost given up hope by the time she got to Sue Anders.

It took three precious minutes to jockey the conversation around to the current plays. That did the trick. Sue fairly sizzled with indignation over the Eastham story.

How idiotic, how perfectly *ridiculous* it was, she raved. Any one with a speck of brains could just look at Tony and *know* that he'd never be guilty of such a thing! He never *bothered* about girls. Why, he'd been the *despair* of all the ambitious mothers back home!

Janet volunteered the wish to meet this fascinating person.

Sue was rather dubious about getting him, however. He was *such* a difficult person to find at *any* time. And *now*, with that perfectly *odious* story! Well, she'd *try*, anyway. Maybe Phil *could* drag him out to dinner. Just the four of them.

No thanks at all. She was just *too* thrilled to do it. But Janet mustn't be too hopeful if he did come. He really was *terribly* immune.

And with that Janet had to be satisfied. She replaced the receiver with a wry and weary smile. Finding him was only a quarter of the battle; the real struggle would come when they met.

BUT it would have been hard to connect the nervously apprehensive girl of that day with the cool, assured young woman in jade-green velvet who entered the Anders' drawing-room at eight that night. Janet herself had a sense of unreality, feeling rather like the villainess in a cheap melodrama.

Both men rose as Sue came to meet her.

"Oh, my *dear*," Sue cried, catching her hands. "I'm *so* glad you could come."

She lowered a cautious eyelid and turned to lead Janet to the men.

"You haven't met Mr. Eastham," she said gayly. "*Do* let me present him."

The girl raised her reluctant lashes and stared into his eyes, her chin tilted bravely. Nine feet tall, he seemed in that awful second, a giant of a man! She almost gasped as his eyes descended to a six-foot level. They stared back at her, paying masculine tribute where, they said, masculine tribute was most obviously in order. Janet probed them wildly, searching for a spark of recognition. None was to be found!

Her breath made a funny little gasping sound as she released it. Her knees felt water weak. How she man-

aged to walk to the dining room she never could remember afterward.

Well, she thought dizzily as the butler seated them, that was over. They had met again. And he hadn't twitched a muscle! Now what?

She thanked God for a sixth social sense during that dinner. It made the proper remark come when she needed it, and twisted her lips into something that passed for a smile.

The nightmarish tension in her brain began to loosen gradually, and a strange elation replaced it, coaxed into being by the warm admiration of his eyes.

Eastham talked a great deal. Janet was thankful for that, too: it gave her an opportunity to look at him.

His mouth *was* nice, she decided. With squarish, very white teeth, that flashed when he smiled—which wasn't so often.

He was talking about airplanes now; he seemed to know quite a bit about them.

"Have you been up, Miss Kelland?" he asked as Sue led the way to the library for coffee. Janet came to with a start.

"I've gone to San Francisco and San Diego," she admitted, "on the liners—if that's what you call them."

"Oh," he said quickly, "then you've never been up in a small plane?" She shook her head. "Well, we must remedy that! Why don't you come out to the studio to-morrow? A friend of mine is doing some stunts for a picture; I could take you up afterward."

Janet thought of many things to say, but not the right one. She wanted to refuse; she would have refused if it hadn't been for Sue.

"Oh, my *dear!*" she cried, turning around to them. "You're going, of *course!* Tony is a *marvelous* pilot, Phil says. You needn't be *the least bit* nervous!"

Janet could have murdered her cheerfully. Nervous! The chattering little fool! Eastham did not urge her, but seemed to accept calmly the fact that she might be afraid. That decided her.

"I—why, yes, of course, I'm going, Sue. I'd love it," she said.

She looked up at him through the fringe of her lashes. A pleased smile wreathed his lips.

"How about twelve? That will give us time for a little jaunt before lunch—if you'll grant me that pleasure?"

Immune, Sue had said. Ummh. He certainly didn't look it at that moment! Janet toyed with the idea of lunch with him. Maybe she'd wait and tell him afterward.

Well, Janet was only human. And it isn't the easiest thing to look an attractive man—a most decidedly attractive man—in the eye and tell him that you are the woman who has ruined his life! No. Decidedly not. So she put it off again.

TWELVE o'clock found her at the studio, and twelve fifteen saw her high in the air, experiencing a blend of emotions.

"Enjoy it!" a wee voice was counseling in her ear. "Make him like you first, and *then* tell him."

"But maybe he'll never like me," Janet argued.

"Don't be so modest!" that voice went on. "Other men have liked you. Didn't you see his face light up when you met him? And didn't he strap you in very, very carefully? As though you're infinitely precious and fragile? Surely those were not the hands of indifference, Janet!"

"But," cried Janet, "I'm cheating! He may despise me when he finds out. He's such a decent chap, and I—no, I can't risk it! I'll *have* to tell him. Today. Just as soon as we land."

From then on she found herself dreading the moment of landing. The half-formed wish went through her mind that they might fly on and on, forever.

It began to seem as though she might have her wish, for Eastham appeared to have no intention of coming down.

The plane winged its way steadily northward; crossed the Santa Monica hills; reached the ocean. Janet peered over the side at the tiny towns below, watching the white line of breakers as they licked up on the beach. A lazy steamer was creeping southward, barely seeming to move, yet leaving V-shaped, far-spreading ripples in its wake.

"Just like a fat old duck!" Janet cried to the man, pointing at the boat.

What did it matter if he did think she was afraid!

The words were torn from her lips and flung far away, but he seemed to understand. She settled back, glanced at her watch and gasped. Twenty minutes! A plane could cover a lot of miles in twenty minutes!

Ten more fled in search of the others. She lifted her wrist and showed him the watch. He nodded. The ship veered to the right as though to circle inland. Eastham looked over the side, evidently getting his bearings; then continued northward.

A slow-growing tightness began to

take possession of Janet's chest. Something was wrong! He hadn't said they would be up so long. She tried to catch his eye, and it was then she noticed a certain grimness about his mouth.

The mountains drew nearer. The fact that they were losing altitude was very apparent. Janet gasped as the plane swooped downward and the pilot's intention to land was forced in upon her.

A long, shallow valley, generously sprinkled with live oak, met the girl's straining eyes. The plane circled, straightened and settled lightly, gliding across the field toward what was, evidently, a guest or shooting lodge.

A diminutive Japanese servant hurried out of the lodge, bobbing and smiling as he ran to meet them.

Eastham silenced the motor and threw one long leg over the side.

"Hello, there, Zowa," he greeted the boy affectionately. "Is that lunch ready, you rascal?"

"Oh, yessir! Yes, missy," Zowa beamed, his black eyes snapping, his breath full of excited hisses. "Will you be so kind as to alight, missy? I will receive your luggage."

"She didn't bring any, Zowa," Eastham assured him gravely. "Just you run in and serve that lunch."

Zowa scurried away.

"WELL," Janet asked sharply, "why didn't you tell me?"

"I was afraid you might refuse," he explained, a devil twinkling in each eye.

"I might yet," she said crisply, settling back.

"Please," he said softly; "please. Don't be Victorian!"

His eyes scoffed at her.

Janet sprang to the ground, and as she sprang her heel turned and she stumbled. Eastham's arms were about her instantly; her laugh was a bit jerky as she drew away.

"Sorry!" she said. "Must 've got air legs up there!"

"I rather enjoyed it—while it lasted!" he observed.

A perfectly absurd but nevertheless delicious panic swept over the girl.

"Where's that lunch?" she demanded hastily, bending over to examine her heel. It took quite a bit of inspecting—judging from the time she spent looking at it. Eastham's eyes were inscrutable as she straightened up. "I'm famished! And let me warn you, sir! It had better be a *good* lunch!"

It was. Very. And her captor was an interesting host. Janet felt a warm sense of intimacy and comfort stealing over her, a sense of belonging.

His plays, of course, came up for discussion, but he passed over them lightly and came back to the subject of herself, asking her many questions.

It wasn't until they left the dining room that she remembered. She'd put it off again! Well, she'd do it now. He took her into the huge living room with its beamed ceiling and many windows, and waited for her to sit down. But she remained standing.

"Mr. Eastham," she began, facing him, her eyes very wide, her hands gripped into nervous fists, "I—"

Before she could say any more, he asked: "How do you like my valley, Miss Kelland? I come here to do most of my work, you know. It's miles from any place. No one ever bothers me."

"Yes, that's what Sue said yesterday morning."

She had his attention now; he looked at her sharply.

"Yesterday morning?" he asked. "Did you say—*morning?*"

"Yes," she answered clearly, "I've been trying to tell you. I had Sue ask you last night."

He didn't ask her reason. He just stood there, waiting, one brow up a bit.

"Oh!" wailed Janet at last, growing hysterical under the strain. "Will you ever *look* at me?"

"But I am looking!" he protested.

"No. You're not!" she contradicted him promptly. "You've *never* looked at me—or else you'd remember!"

"Perhaps I do."

HE was a changed person suddenly, a very grim person. His mouth was set in extraordinarily straight lines, stern lines.

Janet's world began to crumble about her, bit by bit.

"You—you *know?*" she whispered. "You've known all the time?"

"Of course."

"Then—why—?" She gave up the attempt to finish it.

"I needed a new play," he explained shortly, "and you presented me with an original situation. I wanted an opportunity to study you—as my prospective ingénue."

The girl shivered as he turned to stare out of the window.

He'd been studying her! Drawing her out. Examining her like a—a specimen in a laboratory! Something died inside her. Humiliation took its place, sweeping her to her feet.

"Well"—she managed to throw a convincing amount of scorn into her voice—"that *is* amusing! I'm flattered, of course. And it was surely sporting of you!"

"Sporting?" he echoed. "No, I don't mind telling you that that hardly entered into it. One is a sportsman—with sportsmen. If I make myself clear."

"And I'm not quite a sportsman, is that it?"

"Exactly. You ran."

Janet bit her lip and didn't say a word; she couldn't. An odd lump had got into her throat, somehow. It was growing steadily under his implacable stare.

"You got me into a peach of a mess and then you *ran!*"

He turned away from her and walked to the window.

"When," she said coolly; "when you've quite finished you might take me home."

"No!" He almost shouted it. "I'm not going to take you home!"

The girl quivered all over; her pupils dilated until her eyes were black wells in the shadow of her lashes.

"You—you mean you'd keep me here?" she gasped. "Oh! Suppose it got into the papers!"

She knew instantly that that was a mistake. The man said nothing for a long moment, just stared at her.

"Well, I'll—be—" he exploded at last. "So you're only afraid that it might come out in the papers!"

He jammed his hands into his pockets and glared at her, teetering on the balls of his feet.

"And do you know, I'd never have thought of that! But it's a great idea! 'Romantic Justice,' don't you see? 'Janet Kelland, greatly admired débutante, flies to love nest with Anthony Eastham, the *girl-chaser.*' A spicy story!"

"You mean—you'd give *that* to the reporters?" she choked. "Oh, you wouldn't—you *couldn't* do that!"

"Why not? It couldn't hurt *me,* you know."

Never had Janet, in all her varied

experience, met such cynical eyes, such bitter eyes. She wilted down into a chair.

"Ummh," he gibed, with a mocking grin. "Just like that! My dear, you're priceless!"

That was too much. She sprang to her feet again and marched straight up to him, her eyes blazing. There they stood, eye to eye, their faces barely three inches apart, their warm breaths mingling. Then Janet's hand darted out, leaving a red mark on the man's cheek. He didn't give an inch. His hands gripped her shoulders instead.

"For two cents I'd spank you!" he cried, his voice trembling with rage. "Or turn in that news story!"

Then his eyes fastened themselves upon her quivering yet defiant red mouth. The anger left them; something new took its place—a startled wonder. He turned away from her abruptly.

"What," she asked in a ghost of a voice; "what are you—going to do?"

"Take you home, of course," he muttered. The words came slowly, with difficulty. Then he spun around to face her. "No!" he cried. "*No!* I'll not take you home! Not until you tell me why you did it!"

She couldn't know that he added the rest in a futile attempt to convince himself. She heard only the words:

"I need the motive for my play.'

HIS play! She hated him suddenly. She knew that it was hatred—that glowing coal in her chest. His set jaw fanned it into flame, sent it roaring into her brain, clouding her eyes with heavy, acrid smoke.

"Then why don't you get out your little microscope," she taunted, "and look my soul over? You might find the reason!"

"Soul!" He laughed harshly, an undercurrent of pain tugging at his voice. "I'm afraid there's no microscope powerful enough to find it! The next few days may *develop* one, however."

"You mean—you really intend—" She stopped and stared at him unbelievingly.

"Don't you think you deserve it?" he asked. Janet couldn't deny it; but that didn't make the prospect any the less appalling.

"I'm surprised!" he exclaimed. "I expected a torrent of outraged protests! Have you nothing to say, Miss Kelland? Nothing at all?"

Janet saw him dimly. He seemed to sway, to flicker before her whirling senses as he stood there, challenging her to defend herself.

"Well," he said crisply, "that being the case, I'm sure that you'll excuse me. I have some instructions to give Zowa."

He swung about sharply and was gone. Janet listened tensely as his heels clicked down the hall, waiting for him to stop, to come back. But there was no hint of relenting in that rapid progress.

He meant it, then! He was going to keep her here! She crumpled to the floor with a little moan of despair. Her brain kept repeating that it wasn't true. It couldn't be true!

There was much more than apprehension in her heart as the minutes passed: a definite ache, an overpowering sense of loss. Her hopeless eyes roved over the room and lit upon the telephone; the next moment she had it in her fingers and was giving a maddeningly deliberate operator a long distance call.

The ensuing minutes were endless. She waited, her finger on the hook,

ready to lift it at the first warning jingle. It came at last. She choked back a sob as her father's voice sounded from the other end.

The operator's crisp: "There's your party. Go ahead, please!" checked the wave of hysteria and urged Janet into speech.

"Dad!" she cried. "Daddy! I'm in an awful jam! . . . No, no! Let me talk. . . . I *can't* explain! There isn't time. . . . I'm at Anthony Eastham's ranch. You must come after me, right away! . . . I don't know where it is! Some place in the mountains, 'way up the coast. . . . Yes! The playwright. . . . No, not a 'girl-chaser'! He's— Yes, he's that man, all right, but—"

Her father's horrified: "My God!" quivered over the line, and before she could explain she heard Eastham approaching.

"Oh, here he comes!" she wailed. A new fear clutched her heart. She thrust her lips close to the mouthpiece and added imperatively: "But, dad! Whatever you do—*don't call me back.* And hurry!"

SHE said a little prayer as she replaced the receiver. If Eastham suspected that she had called her father he might take her away!

She darted to the window and stared out fixedly, pretending to watch the grayish veil which was sweeping in from the ocean, wrapping itself about the mountain tops, and reaching down thin fingers to the valley floor. She watched them broaden and thicken, then melt into each other to form an ever-shifting curtain which blotted out the trees, one by one.

Eastham came into the room slowly and walked toward her. Janet, icy cold and immovable, held her breath.

"What a fool I was!" he said bitterly. "What a clumsy, thoughtless fool!"

Her heart chugged; stopped; almost failed to resume its labored beat. So he *had* heard her phoning! One hand groped for the drape behind her to steady herself as visions of him dragging her off to some other isolated spot flashed through her mind.

"But I give you my word, Miss Kelland, I never anticipated that Nature would take a hand in our little melodrama! This fog complicates things—rather seriously, I'm afraid. I can't risk taking you up in a blind flight, you see."

The girl's released breath was almost a sob. So he *couldn't* take her away before her father arrived! The hope was short lived, however. It vanished completely with his next words.

"I've no car up here, so we'll have to use Zowa's trusty Ford." He grinned a bit wryly. "Its framework is full of protests, and I rather suspect its venerable motor, but he swears by it. He will, he avers, be most honored by our presence."

"No!" Janet cried wildly. "I won't go! I—"

She broke off suddenly, her eyes going past him to the door. She darted toward it. Eastham sprang after her, overtaking her as she reached the porch.

"Stop it!" he commanded, as she beat against him with clenched fists. "Stop, you little idiot!"

She kicked and twisted desperately, but he lifted her and half carried, half pushed her back into the lodge. He deposited her, rather smartly, upon one of the big chairs, and stood over her menacingly, breathing hard. Eastham was no weakling, but writhing, biting Janet had been an armful.

"Well!" he said at last, "I had no idea that a mere Ford could be so objectionable! And I never dreamed of suggesting that you walk home!" He shook his head wonderingly. "You are a constant revelation to me, Miss Kelland!"

"Home?" echoed Janet, her befuddled mind clutching at the word. "*Home?*"

He paused in the act of reaching for a cigarette and bent an odd look upon her.

"You mean that you were going to take me home?" she persisted.

"Of course! Where in the world—My dear young lady! You don't mean that you actually believed—? So that's the reason you went haywire!"

Janet began to redden.

"But you said—" she accused him.

"Yes," he broke in, "I know I did. But I'm human, you see, rather hotheaded. And I had what most people would consider 'just provocation.' Even so, there are *some* things a decent man won't do—even when it might be justifiable!" He paused and turned one ear toward the window. "I believe that mighty disturbance announces Zowa. What do you wish me to do, Miss Kelland? Tell him that you prefer hiking to Fording?"

"But—" said Janet. She said two "buts" and three "Ohs!" in fact, meanwhile staring at him with miserable eyes.

"What's the matter?" he demanded, his voice losing its studied casualness and becoming frankly concerned. "What *is* it?"

She brushed past him and seized the telephone.

"Don't talk!" she cried wildly, jiggling the hook. "I must— Oh, operator! This is the party who just called Los Angeles. Will you repeat that call, please, as soon as possible? It's very important!"

She pressed the mouthpiece against her and spoke over it to Eastham.

"My father," she explained. "I must catch him before he starts up here."

"You must—!" He checked himself and grimaced wryly. "Well! As the villain of the piece, I'm good! Never even thought of the phone. What did you tell him?"

"I don't know! I was so upset that I probably scared him to death! Oh, will that operator *never* hurry!"

"Why not let him come?"

Janet gasped.

"No, no! He mustn't! He's—he'll—maybe he'll bring a *sheriff!*" Her eyes widened before the agonizing possibility. Eastham fell into a chair with a shout of laughter.

"How about the shotgun?" he contributed. "And the bloodhounds?"

Janet was speechless for a brief moment.

"Oh!" she choked at last. "Can't you be sensible?"

"But, Miss Kelland," he protested, assuming an expression of exaggerated gravity, "I've never had an irate father on my trail before!"

Janet experienced a sudden primitive desire to box his ears, or shake him.

"You — you—!" she stormed. "You're—hopeless! Oh, I must stop him!"

But she didn't stop him. She couldn't. The impersonal operator settled all arguments when she reported that "Mr. Kelland had left the city for an indefinite period."

"Now we'll have to wait for him," Eastham murmured as Janet replaced the receiver. "Otherwise we might miss him en route. And that is *that.*"

But he was wrong. It wasn't. It was very far from that.

DINNER was not the pleasant meal that lunch had been. The girl, more than a little apprehensive, had retreated into a cool silence, and the man, misunderstanding, had not tried to break in upon it.

After dinner he found her several magazines and left her in the living room. Alone. When he had gone, Janet dropped her magazine into her lap and stared at the open fire.

It darted up the chimney as though inviting the wind to combat, jeering at it, daring it to poke in its inquisitive fingers and have them warmed. Yet, even as it gave out the challenge, it kept an eye on Janet, coloring her face and searching out the thoughtful gleam in her eyes.

She stirred and checked her watch with the clock. The wind died away for a moment. The oaks forgot to whisper their relief. A motionless silence settled upon the lodge, over the whole world—or so it seemed to the girl as she sat there, each nerve sharpened to a thin edge with inaction.

She picked up her magazine hastily as she heard Eastham in the hall. He came in quietly and threw a log on the fire.

"Thought you might be cold," he said. "Mind if I join you?"

She read a whole, meaningless paragraph before she lifted her eyes.

"I—beg—your pardon?" she murmured, seeming to return from the distances.

"Nothing," he muttered. He sat down, however, and crossed his knees. "Pipe bother you?"

"No."

She peeped over the top of the magazine to watch him light it.

"Thanks," he said, between two puffs of the smelly old thing. Janet turned a leaf as she felt his eyes upon her.

"A long evening," he volunteered.

"Not so very," she returned absently, though she couldn't recall one that had been longer.

He frowned and clicked his pipe between his teeth. He clicked and clicked. It annoyed her unaccountably.

"Please don't!" she burst out.

"Pardon?" he asked, bewildered.

"That tapping!"

"Oh," he said, emptied the pipe and settled back once more.

Minutes fled. The girl turned pages automatically, their lisp unnoticed over the oak's wind-ruffled protests. The man fed the fire again.

"Must be nearly time for your father to arrive."

"Ummh," contributed Janet.

"I suppose he'll be upset?"

She didn't think it necessary to say yes, but, knowing her father, she thought it exceedingly likely that he would be upset.

"I can handle dad if you'll let me do the talking," she said. "Will you?"

"Well, I don't know. That's rather a large order!" he teased her. "How do I know what you'll say?"

"There you go again! You're such a—a trying person! You refuse to see that this is serious. But, of course, you would, not knowing dad."

"I'll have that pleasure in a very few minutes, I suspect," he reminded her.

"Indeed you will! And you'd better listen to me. Can't you realize that it's going to be pretty bad for *you?*"

"For me? Why, I've not done anything so terrible, have I?"

"It isn't what you've done. It's what he'll *think* you've done!"

"But surely you'll tell him the truth?"

"No, I can't do that. If dad were like any one else, I could tell him the truth. But he—well, you see, *he* may punish me himself, but he won't let others do it! If I tell him what you've done, he'll be so furious that he'll—he'll just *have* to do something about it."

"I see. It doesn't matter about *my* provocation, eh? I've insulted his precious child, is that it?"

"DAD'S a dear!" she flashed. "Don't you dare criticize him!"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Kelland."

"And anyway," she went on, "he'd probably never believe that you intended to send me home before you knew he was coming."

"Even so, what can he do?"

"Oh, don't you see? He'll probably have his attorney, and a sheriff with a warrant and—they'll arrest you and drag you to *jail!*" Her eyes widened. "Even if you get out of it later, it will be too late. Another story of this kind will ruin you."

"It doesn't sound so promising, does it?" he mused, staring at the fire. "My judgment in parents seems to have been rather unfortunate."

"Oh," wailed Janet, "please be serious! Why, oh *why* did you ever bring me up here?"

"But I've told you! Mostly impulse, I guess, and a hazy idea of teaching you a lesson." His face was serious enough as he added the rest: "I've been regretting it ever since, Miss Kelland. Won't you believe me?"

He sprang to his feet and paced back and forth for a minute.

"Well, whatever comes, I deserve it," he said savagely.

"Listen!" Janet cried. "Isn't that a car? Oh, it is! Promise me that you'll keep quiet, no matter what I say. You *must!* I've thought of a way to fix everything, but you mustn't interrupt me. Will you promise? Please!"

He hesitated, then made his decision: "All right. Have it your way. I'm in your hands, fair lady!"

Janet clenched those hands nervously as a car zoomed into the driveway. Tires scraped. A brake clicked. Zowa hurried down the hall. Excited voices came into the living room, mingled with the servant's protests.

Eastham faced the door as three men burst through it. Janet ran to one of them and flung herself into his arms. He glared out over her head at Eastham, his face working. The two pairs of eyes met and locked. Neither wavered. Eastham stood silent, wooden.

Mr. Kelland thrust his daughter aside purposefully, but she clung.

"No, no, daddy!" she protested. "Not that. Not *that!*"

He gripped her arms to move her out of his way; she held on frantically.

"Daddy, listen to me!" she screamed. "You must! He's not done anything. He hasn't, I say!"

"Isn't he the man who kidnaped you?"

"No, no! Nobody kidnaped me! I came *willingly.*"

"*What?*"

Janet looked at Eastham wildly and wished that he wasn't there; that he had never been there. But it was too late for wishes. It was up to her now. She'd have to lie to her dad, her honest old square shooter of a dad.

"Hold me tight, dads," she begged, hiding her face against him. "And send Mr. Goodwin and that other man away."

He complied with a sharp nod toward the door, and the mystified men moved away reluctantly.

"Daddy, hold me tighter!" Janet pleaded in a scared, tense little voice. "Tighter! And don't stop loving me, no matter what I say!"

Her father forced her to look at him; she met his eyes miserably.

"What are you trying to tell me, Janet?" he demanded.

"I—we—" And then it came, all in a rush, her voice barely more than a whisper. "I came up here because I wanted to."

MR. KELLAND'S jaw dropped; so did Eastham's. The girl's eyes fell. "Janet Kelland!" the older man gasped. "You—"

Eastham took a step toward them.

"That's a lie, sir!"

Janet whirled on him fiercely.

"Hush!" she commanded. "I know what I'm doing, Anthony Eastham!"

"You can't! I won't let you—"

"Stop!" thundered Mr. Kelland. "What does this mean, Eastham? What is your excuse for not marrying her?"

"He wanted to!" Janet cried, tugging at him to attract his attention. "Don't blame *him,* dad! It was I! I didn't want to marry anybody. Nobody does any more!"

Her father looked down at her with a slow-growing, outraged anger.

"You mean you've done this kind of thing—*before?*" he exploded.

"No! Oh, *no!*" she gasped, scandalized. "That's why I got panicky and wanted to go home!"

"And you had to call me to come and get you! Wouldn't this—this—" Not finding a word strong enough for Eastham, he had to use his name: "Wouldn't Eastham take you?"

"He couldn't! The fog was so thick he couldn't fly his plane." She gave her father a heartbroken glance. "Oh, I wish I hadn't called you, if you're going to be like this. It isn't as if—as if— Oh, please, dads," she entreated, "don't scold. I don't like me very much right now, anyway! And if *you* go back on me I'm — just— sunk."

She sounded—and was—perilously close to tears. Her father's face softened, and he gathered her up into his arms.

"There, there, Janey," he comforted her. "I'm glad you called me—that you wanted to call me."

The auburn head, with its gleaming bits of gold, wilted against him. She felt that she could stand a good bit of comforting just then. The world was all out of kilter, somehow a cruel, disgusting place.

"Do you love him, Janey?" Mr. Kelland asked.

She started to deny it hotly, caught the words back in time, and nodded, keeping her face hidden.

"I've decided to marry him—if he still wants me," she mumbled into her father's coat.

Eastham's start was noticeable, but Mr. Kelland wasn't looking at him.

"Indeed you'll not!" he roared. "Marry that scoundrel? Why, he's a—he's nothing but a *girl-chaser!*"

"Don't you dare call him that!" Janet flared, her head rearing for battle. "When it was all your fault!"

He glared at her incredulously. She gasped. Now she *had* done it! His face warned her that a bold stroke was imperative, or all her carefully built story would be in vain.

"Well, it was," she repeated. "Do you know the girl he was chasing? It was me. *Me!*" She pounded her

chest to emphasize the words. "You should have known better than to give me that roadster!"

She swept into a more or less true account of the episode, putting great emphasis on Eastham's part as a friend who, knowing of the impending jail sentence, had offered to let the cop think he'd been annoying her.

She painted him as a modern knight errant, but she avoided his eyes during the recital. What a little beast he must think her! Probably thought she was doing it to protect herself, too.

"Well," said her father as she finished. "Well!"

He didn't say anything else. There wasn't much to say, and besides, Janet did all the talking as she gathered up her coat and gloves, and bundled him from the room.

There was something in Eastham's eyes that frightened her, made her feel that he was very near an outburst. She knew that she must hurry her father away before it materialized.

SHE got him to the car, but when she started to get in, she found that she couldn't. She couldn't budge an inch farther until she'd seen Anthony Eastham again. That's what she told her father.

She didn't knock; she walked in. And there he was, all huddled down at his desk, his big dark head buried in his arms.

"Go 'way, Zowa," he said, and turned his face over the other way. All huddled down. Hopeless.

That was Anthony Eastham, the well-known playwright, his ruffled head looking so boyish. Not cynical—boyish, with a despairing abandon that squeezed on the girl's heart.

Her breath caught with an unhappy little sound, something between a cough and a groan. She couldn't force one foot before the other. She just stood there helplessly.

He opened his eyes at that odd, choking noise, opened them wide. They grew luminous as he looked at her.

"You—you really don't have to marry me," Janet whispered. She hadn't meant to say that, but she had to say something.

"Of course not," he said patiently. The shine slunk away from his eyes, gave way to disappointment. She turned to go, even started toward the door. But she just *had* to turn once more.

"No," she said. "*No!* I won't go!"

His head twisted about; his eyes burned into hers, parched, hungry eyes.

"Janet! You don't mean—?"

That was just what she did mean, only she couldn't say it. Her tongue clicked and wouldn't utter a sound.

"God!" breathed the man. It wasn't a curse. It was a prayer.

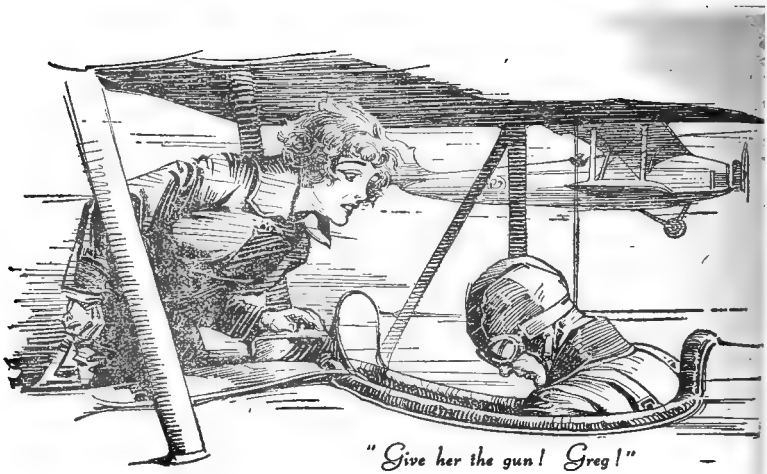
The next moment they were enfolded in each other's arms.

"And you know, Janet," Eastham marveled, ignoring the impatient snort of the horn outside, "when you dodged that ticket, Officer Cupid played another of his pranks and—tagged me!"

She burrowed her nose into the curve of his shoulder.

"I was too great a fool to realize it then, and when it did dawn on me, I thought it was too late."

But of course it wasn't. For Janet's father had no influence whatever with Officer Cupid. She was, unquestionably, slated to do a stretch this time. With a contented little sigh she snuggled closer, willing—nay, eager, to work out her life sentence.



"Give her the gun! Greg!"

Wings of Love

Gael found that love transcends self when she forfeited pride to save the man who had scorned her

By Esther Melbourne Knox

"WHO does Arline Davis think she is anyway — Clara Bow?" demanded Nita Wayne scornfully from the depths of the Marches' old couch swing. "Why, the way that girl made for Greg Allen last night at Sallie's was a positive crime! And Greg, of all men, to be dumb enough to fall for it!

"'Oh, yes!' the men say. 'Give me a girl who has no nonsense about her—a *real* pal!'" she mimicked vigorously, "and then they crack up over these mid-Victorian babies who are right there with the eye-work, but as hard to kiss as one of these—uh—Ubango belles with the plate lips!"

Gael March, curled up in the shabby wicker chair opposite, looked up from her sewing to laugh.

"You've got your dates mixed, Nita. Wouldn't Clara love being called 'mid-Victorian'!"

"You know what I mean, all right." Nita Wayne was plump and aggressive. Her brown eyes snapped. "Honestly, Gael, when she was asking him all about the per-r-r-ils of flying in one of those bad old airplanes I nearly went

ga-ga and climbed up the living room walls! I don't see how you stood it! Why, everybody in town knows Greg Allen's never paid a lick of attention to any girl but you.

"As soon as I heard she was coming back here to spend the summer among the cows and chickens, after her glorious seasons here and there, I said to myself that she'd snatch off half a dozen or so airmen to guard against the horrid thought of death from boredom. I know her! What are you going to do, Gael?" she finished abruptly.

"Do?" countered Gael. "Why, what *can* a poor gal do?"

It was an effort to speak lightly. She bent her head over the full darning basket in her lap; her throat felt painfully dry and tight at the thought of last night.

"The worst of it is," wailed Nita anew, "we'll all have to follow Sallie's lead and ask her to everything, so's not to look catty. And where, I ask you, Gael March, am I to get another man for my bridge Tuesday night? Nobody but a sleight-of-hand artist could produce one in Westlake at this late date."

She paused to draw a breath before she went on, thoughtfully:

"It's that helpless way of hers that gets 'em. You know, Gael, it doesn't pay to be too efficient. That is, where it shows. Men all seem to have a blind spot in their beans when it comes to that wide-eyed 'you're-so-big-and-strong' stuff. Noticed it?"

Gael wiggled a finger through a big hole in the sock she was working on.

"I'd like to know what'd happen to this family if *I* tried that one! Like as not, I'd just have it going fine when my dad would burst in on us and say, 'Gael, the water won't run down in the tub. Come on up and take the plumbing apart and see what's wrong with it. You're so good at that sort of thing.' Dad and Jim would just naturally die of hunger—or move, bag and baggage, to the poorhouse!"

Nita laughed. "No," she admitted, "I guess you couldn't fool any one. You look so smart, somehow. And housekeeping doesn't give you an awful lot of spare time for vamping, does it? Not"—she added sweetly as she cast an appreciative glance at the other girl's bent red head and crisp black organdie ruffles—"that you need it, old dear!"

Nita Wayne could well afford to be generous. She had just become engaged to Graham Evans and looked with a peaceful eye, therefore, on the rest of womankind.

Gael's needle was weaving rapidly in and out; tears were somewhere just back of her eyes, hot and aching.

THE day Gregory Allen came to Westlake Gael March had been eighteen — a slim, red-haired little tomboy who took her job of making a home for her father and young brother Jim very casually. Her eyes were as wistful and brown as a spaniel's, there was a drift of warm, golden freckles across the bridge of her nose, a tiny brown mole on her cheek, and her mouth was too large for the rest of her features—the generous sort, with corners that turned up with unexpected charm.

Gregory was a pilot at the new Westlake Airport, and Gael fell in love with him the moment she laid eyes on him. She had been playing tennis with her brother, dressed, for comfort, in a pair of Jim's scout shorts and an old blouse with the sleeves hacked out. Gregory, in the very act of mov-

ing into the boarding house next door, dropped his suitcases to retrieve a ball that had come hurtling toward him over the rickety backstop.

"You swing a mean racket, youngster!" he shouted lustily across the lawn.

"Who, me?" grinned Jim.

"Not much! I mean your little red-headed pal!"

In spite of the immense indignity of his thinking her Jimmy's age, it was at that moment it happened. It was at that moment Gael March grew up. She never thought of Gregory Allen again without experiencing the thrill of that first moment, without seeing a misty counterpart of him as he stood there, long-legged and tall against a background of sun-flecked green; keen blue eyes laughing at her across the glare of the court, silver-blond hair ruffled in the wind, white teeth a shining contrast to the lean brown of his face.

Taking her mother's place hadn't been easy these three years. There were days when she almost hated the shabby brown house with its never-ending demands on her time. Dishes and cleaning . . . marketing and darning . . .

Gael sighed, an inaudible, motherly little sigh as she inspected the last sock in the basket. It was Jim's, and he was getting harder and harder on his things! She wished Nita would stop talking about last night; it was a painful but fascinating subject, somehow . . .

BOTH girls leaned forward as a car drew up at the curb of the house next door.

"Look at that, will you!" breathed Nita, eyebrows raised. "Fast work, I calls it!"

It was Arline Davis's long yellow car, and there was Gregory Allen getting out. He waved a friendly, vigorous hand in the general direction of the Marches' porch, but turned immediately to say something to the girl in the drooping hat at the wheel. The car door slammed and a light laugh floated triumphantly over to two pairs of listening ears—a laugh as empty and frivolous as a soap bubble.

"Of course," admitted Nita Wayne, when they had watched the roadster out of sight around the corner, "in all fairness, there's this much to be said for her method, Gael. Men are funny. They can really be in love with a girl and never know it. Sometimes they need a shock to bring them to. Sounds queer, and I've never told a soul, but"—she lowered her voice and looked behind them into the empty living room—"Graham and I probably wouldn't be engaged this minute if I hadn't—well—sort of taken things into my own hands.

"Do you remember Sallie's picnic, when I sprained my ankle? When Graham and I went for water? I've never told this to any one, Gael, but—it wasn't sprained. I just pretended it was! And—I didn't *really* faint . . ."

"Why, Nita Wayne!"

Gael looked horrified for a moment and then burst out laughing. It was so like Nita! Then she stopped laughing and a speculative look crept into her brown eyes.

"I might get him to go swimming and pretend to drown, you mean? But Greg knows I can swim better than he can! So *that's* no use. Or—let's see—I could make believe the house was on fire at just the right moment, so's he could dash over and save me! Oh, but—think of the mess I'd have to clean up!"

Both girls were laughing helplessly by this time. The socks slid off Gael's lap unnoticed.

"No," she said seriously at last, "that was all right for you, Nita, because you were dead sure Graham felt that way about you, weren't you? But—I'm not. No, there isn't a thing I can do that I can see. Just stand by and be myself. If he ever does fall in love with me, it won't be because I made him. I couldn't bear that. If Arline's the girl—why, I guess it's all right with me."

She tried to hold her voice to a light, jaunty tone, and it might have been convincing if it hadn't been for the little quaver that crept in at the very last. The sob that was rising in her throat at the thought of Arline and Gregory was making it ache desolately. If only her mother were alive, she'd be able to help her do *something* about it. Help her fix her clothes, or arrange parties for her like the other girls or—

She thought about it after Nita had gone home, as she moved swiftly around the kitchen getting dinner.

"Don't be an idiot, Gael March," she caught herself up severely as she was about to salt the potatoes twice. "Feeling sorry for yourself! You ought to be ashamed."

"Gael! Hey! Where are you? Listen!"

It was Jim, crashing in at the kitchen door. He was waving the evening paper.

"Look at this, will you? '*Endurance Flight to Test Mettle of Local Flyers!*' They're going to pull it off after the stunt flying in the big airplane show."

Jimmy was an ardent air enthusiast; his one sorrow in life was that he was not old enough to get a pilot's license himself.

"Yessir," said Jim, with the impressiveness that is a part of being fourteen, "it's Greg Allen's big chance. The winner of these rackets can write his own pay check with any of the big airplane companies, and, gosh, sis, think of the testimonials!"

Together they read every word. Gael's cheeks were bright with excitement. This was the chance Gregory was looking for. He was a keen flyer, a daring pilot, but there hadn't been anything spectacular about his career yet. They had often talked of it, and many times Gregory had been on the point of chucking his job at the port, of going in for some solo that would make him stand out from the rest of the boys. Gael had always persuaded him to stick it out. "You'll see," she had said, "your chance will come."

Well, here it was!

DURING the next two weeks the town buzzed with news of the contest. The papers featured it in glowing headlines; there were front-page pictures of the participating flyers—Gregory Allen's was carefully cut out and given a prominent place on the wall of a certain red-haired young lady's bedroom—there was a picture of the wealthy manufacturer who was offering the large cash prize—Westlake became intensely air-conscious almost overnight. Bets were taken on every side, and many and hot were the arguments, especially among the younger generation.

Until about a week before the big event Gregory Allen seemed to be the favorite, but Gael's brother, Jim, expressed himself forcibly on the subject one night over his dinner plate.

"Nope," he remarked gloomily with his mouth full. "Greg Allen won't have a look in. Did you see Long's

store window, dad? Gee, they've got it fixed up great this week! Airplane models that would knock your eye out and right in the—"

"What do you mean 'won't have a look in'?" Gael interrupted him coldly. She put her fork back on her plate.

"But," she said, "what would happen if he should doze off?"

"Aw, you know. Too busy chasin' around with that dame nights—that dolled-up babyface. He won't be able to make the grade, that's all. Up all hours. Prancin' all over the country. I been keepin' tabs on him." And Jimmy frowned darkly. "The guy that'll win this thing's the guy that's in the best condition. They say it's somethin' fierce after a while, fightin' to keep awake and havin' to buck that monotonous buzz of the motor!

"Yessir, I'm darn glad he doesn't come around here as often as he used to—a guy that'll fall down on a swell job like this! Pat Brennon's the bird *I'm* bettin' on. *He's* no sheik! He's gettin' plenty of rest and keepin' in trim."

After Jim had left the dining room Mr. March came over to Gael and put an arm across her shoulders.

"What's bothering my litle old 'March Gael'?" he asked gently, but with a keen look at her troubled face.

"Not a thing, daddy," she evaded him, laughing a little shakily. "Jim's

growing up, isn't he? Did you get the proprietary air? Funny youngster, isn't he?"

"Well, all I have to say," announced her father as he tucked the evening paper under his arm and prepared to make for his retreat next to the radio, "is that if anybody's worrying my girl they'd better look out! When it's time for everybody else to quit is when a red-head begins to get into action, isn't it, daughter?"

Gael might fool her father, but there was no use in pretending to herself. Greg's casual visits had become less and less frequent. Why, he used to slide in the back door nearly every night to tell her what had happened during the day, but the last month or so the cookies she kept for him grew stale in the jar. She didn't have to be much of a sleuth to know that Arline Davis was taking up every minute of his free time. He certainly made no secret of it!

"Perhaps Nita was right," admitted Gael to herself a little bitterly. "Men only like the useful sort like me when there's no one else around!"

AND when Gregory did drop in she found it hard to treat him with her old gay freedom of manner. Arline's smooth china doll skin, her perfect features and her golden head, that was waved as evenly as a wig, seemed always between them like a shadow of constraint. Greg was looking tired these days, sometimes actually haggard.

"Gael," he asked her one evening, "why don't the girls in this town like Arline? Why don't *you* like her?"

Something hot and fierce rose up in Gael. This was her chance to queer things. She'd tell him what kind of a girl Arline was, why none of the girls could *see* her—selfish and vain—and silly . . .

She looked up at Gregory and opened her lips to speak. For a fleeting second she saw that shadowy other Gregory . . . long-legged and dear against a background of sun-dappled green, keen eyes laughing at her across the years of their friendship, silver-blond hair ruffled in the wind, white teeth shining a contrast to the lean brown of his face.

"Why—I don't dislike Arline, Greg," she said evenly.

"Don't 'dislike' her, eh? I didn't ask you that! Why don't you *like* her?"

"I said that I didn't dislike her and that's exactly what I meant," said Gael, a stubborn little line settling around her wide mouth.

"I see," said Greg, wisely. "That's your story and now you're stuck with it, is that it?"

Gael was silent for a long moment; then she drew a long breath and plunged in. She wouldn't fight for Gregory, she had decided that long ago; but she would make *him* fight to bring out the best that was in him!

"Gregory Allen, are you still going to fly in this contest? You don't look to me as though you're in any condition for it. You're jumpy and tired and thinner. And I'm mighty disappointed in you. I was counting on you, too. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Hadn't you better withdraw?"

The man looked at her quietly. Nothing much got by Gael! Then he turned away so that only a portion of his cheek was visible in the half light.

"Withdraw? Not much!" he said curtly.

Gael's hungry brown eyes were on his profile. "Greg," and this time

the little quaver in her voice was harder to control, "Greg, won't it be dangerous, when you're not up to it?"

"You can bet your sweet life it will," said the man, grimly. He dropped down beside her in the swing and put one lean, hard young hand over hers.

"You've enough to do without worrying about me, m'dear," he said gently. "How's a man to please these women, anyhow? One wants me to step out high, wide and handsome every night in the week, regardless. And another insists that I fold up every night at eight. Now, is that right?"

WHAT a dear, funny little thing she was! As motherly as a hen with one chick. He had always thought that if he ever did find the one woman in the world she'd be kind of like Gael—small and sweet and serious—and sort of homely. But lately he couldn't understand himself.

Now, a girl like Arline, for instance—a girl who could keep a man guessing, keep his heart pounding, exasperate and please him all at once . . . and, gosh, she was a beauty!

On a sudden impulse he turned and tilted Gael's surprised face up to his. He had intended to drop a light, brotherly little kiss on her cheek, but at his touch the girl's vivid, irregular face blazed into a glory that almost blinded him. Her brown eyes were shining straight into his. And before he realized what he was doing, the man's lips were pressed hard against her quivering mouth.

"Great guns," said Gregory to himself a little later, as he made his somewhat dazed way across the shadowy tennis court to his room, "did I ever think Gael March *homely?* That girl's a raving beauty if there ever was one! One thing's certain, I mustn't go there again. She's too sweet a kid to—"

Alone on the dark porch long after Gregory had left, Gael watched the lights in the neighboring houses go out, one by one. The odors of the summer night crowded warm and sweet around her. She pressed her rough red head deeper into the cushions to cool her scorching cheeks.

"Oh, if he'd only *said* something," she groaned from the depths of her troubled heart. The creak of the swing was like a dirge.

"It isn't possible, you fool," said Gregory Allen to himself, as he snapped off his reading light and prepared for sleep two hours later, "to be in love with two girls at once!" But whether or not it was possible, he tossed and turned until daybreak and was late getting out to the airport.

A WEEK went by, a long, dragging week to Gael, with nothing—and everything—changed. No chance presented itself to talk to Greg again about not entering the contest, and as each day went by the ominous dread of a crack-up weighed more and more heavily on Gael's heart.

The day before the show she threw her pride to the winds and drove out to the port early, determination in every line of her small figure. At the wheel of the battered old family car she looked pale and curiously older. Her brown linen suit was rumpled and her old brown béret dragged down any way over her red curls.

There were several planes on the field, and mechanics in dirty jumpers were hard at work going over them with meticulous care. There was the Eagle, Greg's ship, but there was no sign of his tall, active figure. Instead,

a small, white-jumpered one was busy at the engine with an oilcan and an enormous piece of waste. She knew Gregory's mechanic, a loyal youngster known as Shorty. They had had many a joke together, but now she greeted him with a serious, intent look on her face. He barely nodded and went gloomily on with his work.

"Hasn't shown up yet," he said, sullenly, as if in answer to her unspoken question, "and there's the heck of a lot to do on the ship, too."

Gael seated herself on a tool box. Her mind was made up. Nita and her kind might win their men by pretending to drown, to faint, to sprain ankles—that was all right for them, but for her sort there was no such subterfuge. Loving a man meant casting your lot *with* him, not cooking up plans *against* him.

"Shorty," she said simply, without preliminaries, "do you think he can make it?"

The boy looked up quickly, as if he were about to say something and then thought better of it. He shrugged, noncommittally. This was just another jane, and he was off janes for life. Wasn't one of 'em responsible for ditching the chances of one of the best pilots at the port?

Then Gael put out an appealing brown hand and touched his arm. Shorty wavered—and was lost. Maybe—just *maybe* this was a different breed. Why, gosh! Those were tears in her eyes. He looked away from her in panic.

And then, somehow, they were at once deep in conversation—the two to whom Gregory Allen and his affairs were of such absorbing interest—Shorty, gesticulating wildly with his piece of oily waste and the girl who rubbed distracted fingers through her hair until it radiated from her head like a blazing halo.

"Now get me, it ain't that I'm against him, y'understand. A guy can certainly do all the runnin' he wants so long as it *don't interfere with his job,* see? And a pilot's job's the kind that takes more real stuff than any in the world. Nerves 'n' brains 'n'—" Shorty faltered and choked. He rubbed his eyes with the back of a dirty hand. "And now he's slipped and he—don't—know—it!"

"What would happen, Shorty, if a man should doze off in one of these endurance flights? Could he fight it off and make a landing?"

"Some guys might, but not him. He'd die tryin'—tailspin and crack-up—that's all." Shorty said it simply, but with emphasis.

Gael caught her breath. Here was some one who knew the Gregory that she had seen that first day across the tennis court, that day three years ago. They couldn't both be wrong! She clasped her hands so tightly together that the knuckles showed white.

"And—how could I get her out of a spin? What would I have to do?"

"You push down on the stick and *give 'er the gun!* Like that!"

Shorty's voice sank to a terse whisper. He smashed a clenched black fist against a flinty palm.

"The—what?"

"The gun! The juice! *Power!* Get me?"

In breathless silence they looked at each other. Then the boy laughed in embarrassed fashion and turned aside.

"Aw—a jane wouldn't have the nerve!" His shrug was eloquent.

"I'm not afraid," Gael declared slowly. "How could we work it?"

"He'd be out of the runnin' for the money, that's flat," spoke Shorty, his

voice gruff with admiration. "The cash is fer solo, see? But—"

His gaze went thoughtfully over the Eagle. Then he turned decisively to the alert, questioning face beside him. "Well—" he began, on a long, deep breath.

THE great day was clear and cool. There was a slight breeze, just enough to stir the heavy leaves of the trees that bordered the road to the airport. The flyers were to hop off just before sundown, after the stunt flying, so that they would be fresh for night work.

By four o'clock cars packed the parking space and lined the avenue to the hangars. Press photographers were busy, trying to follow the lean, hard young men in flying kit, the youngsters who so coolly challenged man's deadliest barriers to accomplishment—fatigue and man himself.

Feminine frills gave color to the crowd; girls fluttered close to the ropes that kept the planes from being swamped. Nita Wayne, with Graham in tow, was the center of a laughing group. Jimmy March, pushing his way impatiently through to speak to Gregory, looked them over for his sister, Gael. There were curly blondes, sleek black bobs, picture hats and bright bérets, but no little red-head was in sight. He was puzzled. It certainly wasn't like Gael not to be on deck at such a time.

Drawn up conspicuously, where it had no business to be, was Arline Davis's car, with Arline in gauzy white at the wheel. Jimmy scowled. He watched with disgust while she beckoned to Gregory, who was standing a little listlessly beside the Eagle. Jimmy saw him walk quickly toward her. Too quickly.

"Just wanted to wish you luck, Greg," said Jim, awkwardly, when Arline had finished her low-voiced conversation. "Haven't seen my sister around, have you?"

"Thanks, Jim, old boy!" Gregory gave the boy's hand a quick, hot grasp. "No, I haven't seen her all week. Sort of thought she'd be on hand to wish me luck, though!"

And he was more disappointed than he could say. It surprised him now how much he had counted on her support.

What a week he had put in! Several times he had made up his mind to ask Arline to marry him, but with the words almost on his lips, the memory of Gael's burning kiss had kept him silent. Last night, before he went out with Arline to dance those "few dances" that had stretched on, in spite of his determination to get some sleep, until dawn, he had promised himself that as soon as he got this flight thing off his mind, he'd feel better and be able to steer some kind of a course. This Arline affair had gathered such momentum that it was rushing him along, whether he would or not!

Just as the sun slipped behind the thick row of trees that bordered the west side of the great field the planes rose gracefully, one by one, and scattered in the yellow glow, the roar of their perfectly-tuned engines growing fainter and fainter upon the ears of the watchers.

Gael March, securely hidden in the front cockpit of the Eagle, under the extra gas tank, could hear her own heart thundering furiously above every other sound. Blind terror clutched at her throat with iron fingers. What a silly little fool she had been to do this thing! *Should she shout to Greg to take her down?*

The words formed in her dizzy brain, but before they reached her lips her whole valiant little being rose to fight them down. Inch by inch she forced back the wave of crazy fear that was engulfing her until her breath came more naturally and the weight on her chest lifted. A tingling sensation swept over her like an electric current, a feeling of victory, of fierce hot exultation. She closed her eyes and faced the old, glamorous image of Gregory with a smile.

The slowly darkening hours swept around the plane like heavy-winged birds. Gregory was holding his altitude, but keeping the speed of his motor down to a minimum.

And—back there, what was he thinking.

Again and again, in the cramped blackness of the front cockpit, Gael went over Shorty's hoarse instructions.

"Remember, there's no throttle in the front pit. That means no power. Get me? *No power.* When you feel 'er going into a spin—you can't mistake it, the wind in the struts sounds like somethin' dyin'—when you feel 'er going into a spin push down on the stick with everything you've got! And yell back at him, 'Give 'er the gun!' Get me? *Yell it.* Like that. It's your one chance."

TOWARD morning Gael thought she could no longer bear the agony of her cramped limbs and the monotony of the motor's drone. Every nerve, every sense was painfully alert. She tried shifting her position, rubbing and stretching muscles on which the lightest touch burned like acid. A thousand times her fancy heard the sound of wind "like somethin' dyin'." A thousand times her mind told her it was only imagination.

Dawn had begun to spread pale fingers across the night sky when Gael felt the plane give a slight lurch and a quiver before it settled into an unmistakable spin motion that made her heart plunge downward with sickening force.

Slowly, slowly there arose a strange sound. Now it was a scream. *The scream of the wind in the struts!*

Swiftly, mechanically, she pushed down on the stick with every atom of her slender strength. As steady as a rock now she crawled from her cramped little hiding place. One deep breath of the keen early morning air and—

"Give 'er the gun! Greg! Give 'er the gun!"

A flaming red head against the sunrise; a flaming, vibrant voice in a yell so lusty that it stung Gregory Allen's swiftly fading consciousness with the sharp impact of a steel-sheathed bullet. He responded automatically. The plane rose on ever-steadying wings. The wind ceased to whine.

Thoroughly awake now, the pilot put a bewildered hand to his forehead.

"It's—Gael! She saved my life!"

Vitality flooded his tired body so that every nerve throbbed with the force of it. It was as though a hot, white light had burst upon his brain, clarifying his indecision, burning to ashes all cluttering thoughts of Arline and the past weeks.

"What a girl! What a *partner* for a man. What a wife!" He gave the words to the fresh wind reverently.

THE creak of the Marches' old couch swing was far from dirge-like to-night. It was playing a joyful little tune, really, only neither

Gael nor Gregory Allen could take time to listen to it. They were much too busy listening to each other. The lights of the neighboring houses were going out, one by one. Down the block a radio was sending "The Song to the Stars" out to meet the warmth of the summer night.

"When did you first begin to love me, dear?" asked Gregory, with great originality.

Although that information had been uppermost in Gael's mind for a long, long time she hesitated, demurely. "When? Let's see. Why, I think it must have been that very first day you moved in across the way. Remember? You called me 'red head' or something like that. Jim and I were playing tennis."

The swing creaked on dreamily. Suddenly Gael sat up. "Greg," she asked anxiously, "are you sure you don't mind my spoiling your chance for the prize the way I did? You might not have crashed, you know—you might have—"

This was only the hundredth time she had asked him that since that dawn.

"S-s-sh, you silly little darling," said the man, absently, busy with some memories of his own. "I *did* win the prize, the only one that counts, and you know it!"

"Gael," he went on, his voice deepening, "all my life I've said to myself that the girl *I* married must be a real pal—a girl like you, my darling—all wool and a yard wide—a girl with no nonsense about her."

In the dark, with her soft cheek pressed against his warm one, Gael March smiled wickedly.

The Orphan Bungalow

EVERY little cottage
Has its groom and bride,
Rows and rows of houses
Stiff with pride,
Roses in the gardens,
And pots and pans inside!

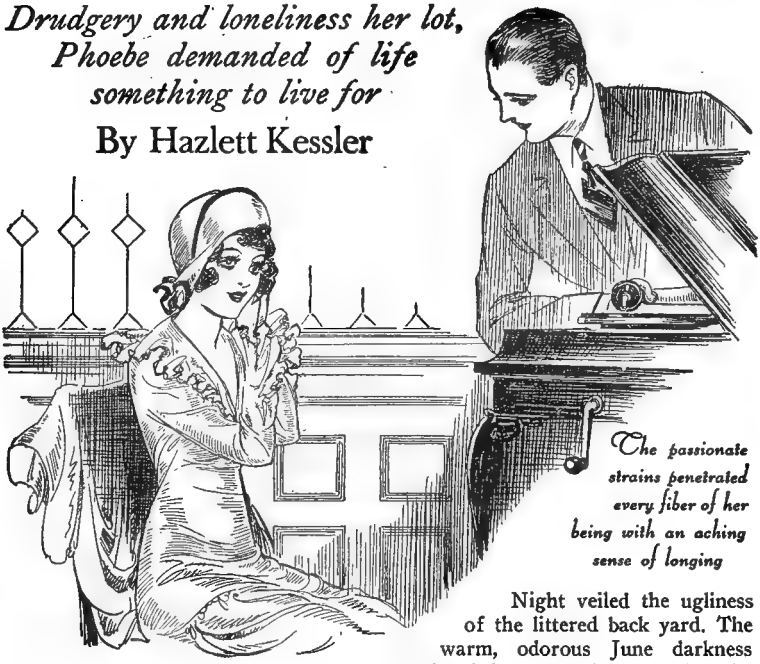
But, among the houses,
In a strutting row,
There's a small, neglected
Orphan bungalow!
It's hoping we'll adopt it—
I hope so too, you know!

—*Mary Carolyn Davies*

One Stolen Hour

Drudgery and loneliness her lot, Phoebe demanded of life something to live for

By Hazlett Kessler



The passionate strains penetrated every fiber of her being with an aching sense of longing

CAUTIOUSLY Phoebe Harris removed the sliding screen from her bedroom window. She leaned out over the sill and dropped the screen to the ground, a few feet below. Then she swung her slim legs out of the window, poised for an instant, and jumped.

For a moment she stood rigid, hesitant, while she forced the fear of consequences to the background of her mind.

Night veiled the ugliness of the littered back yard. The warm, odorous June darkness stirred the unrest that tugged at the girl's spirit.

She picked up the window screen and replaced it noiselessly, then with quickening steps she walked away from the house, up the alley, into the street. She did not look back.

Winona was waiting at the corner as she had promised. A wavering arc light picked out her sharp, powdered prettiness.

At Phoebe's breathless approach her friend greeted her:

"I was beginning to think you got scared out and weren't coming."

"Oh, Win, it's good of you to wait."

"Have any trouble getting away?"

"No-o. But I'm scared to think of what pa'll do to me if he finds out I'm gone."

"Don't worry; he won't. What 'd it hurt him if you have a little fun? Here you are, eighteen. As old as I am, though you don't look it—'cause you're so small, I suppose. And you never get to go any place or have any fun at all!"

Phoebe's eyes clouded—shy dark eyes that glowed in an elfinlike face. She was small, dark and slender. There seemed little about her to attract attention.

And yet, at the right moment, a poet's eyes might have discerned an elusive, haunting beauty, as exquisite as that of a half-hidden woods flower, slowly blossoming in a patch of leaf-filtered sunlight.

Phoebe did not respond to her companion's shrill sentences with any phrases of youthful bravado.

Winona, shaking her cocksure blond head, spoke with what was possibly exasperated tenderness:

"Well, forget your pa for a while and enjoy life. It's Saturday night, and I said I was going to show you a big time, and I will. Come on! We're headed for the Tokio."

They walked quickly toward the lonesome brilliance of the coal mining town's principal street. Phoebe greatly admired Winona's self-assurance. As they darted through the swarming crowds of the business section, Winona nodded carelessly to passing youths.

Winona's shoes and skirt and dimity blouse were of the latest mode. She worked at the overall factory, and was allowed to keep half of her wages every week! Phoebe sighed. *She* never had any money to spend.

Presently they turned into the hallway entrance of the town's newest dancing place. At the ticket window Winona plumped down two dimes as admission fee for them both.

Phoebe grasped her companion's arm, and her soft brown eyes glowed brighter with anticipation as they ascended the stairs.

At the top, Winona elbowed her way through the crowd composed of those youths who never seem to dance, but always watch with avidity. As a dance was in progress, she led the way to a row of chairs.

Phoebe sat quietly, marveling at the garish splendor of her surroundings. Huge Japanese lanterns were suspended from the ceiling, and paper parasols adorned the walls, which were tinted a light blue. A flimsy wooden railing inclosed the dancing space.

At one end of the hall was a cluster of small round tables, where soft drinks were served; at the other the orchestra platform — a bowerlike place, screened at both sides with lattice, to which imitation teakwood lamps were attached.

The tingling blare of jazz came loudly to Phoebe's ears. The moving, shifting mass of dancers confused her shy eyes. She noticed couples drinking at the small tables, and young men standing about, smoking cigarettes. There was the steady hum of talk.

The tantalizing, throbbing music ceased suddenly. Handclapping followed.

As the dancing floor cleared, a smug-faced youth stopped in front of them.

"Hello!" he greeted Winona. "How's the jazz lady?"

"Spilling over with pep!" she re-

turned. "Mr. Jackson, this is a friend of mine — Phoebe Harris. Here for the first time. But she can dance; don't get scared. I taught her myself."

"Good recommend, Win."

"When she gets her bearings she'll be one of the best little steppers on this floor," asserted Winona. "I'm putting you wise early. You'll be getting a good partner. So treat her nice and help her get acquainted."

"Sure thing." He beamed at Phoebe. "Come on! Let's step. Don't forget I've got some dances with you, too, Win!"

With racing pulses and delicately flushed cheeks, Phoebe put a hand on her partner's arm. He drew her close, and they swung off. Her first dance!

After her nervous timidity had passed, she got along very well. She possessed, naturally, rhythm and grace, and Winona had taught her the steps—instruction given on days when Phoebe had stopped at her friend's while out delivering washings.

PHOEBE was not greatly besieged with dance partners throughout the evening, although Jackson, having found her pliant and light on her feet, did not hesitate to make her acquainted with some of the other youths.

Several young men danced with her once or twice, but she did not leap into popularity. She did not have Winona's effervescent personality.

But Phoebe didn't mind. She was content to sit and look at the crowd. It was fun just to watch the dancers and listen to the music.

She noticed particularly a young man who was standing not far from where she was seated. She saw that he did not dance much. He was smoking a cigarette and watching the whirling couples with indifferent interest.

Surely it wasn't because he couldn't find a partner. He was far too good-looking for that. He was slenderly tall, with a keen, pleasant face, stamped with a fineness that was lacking in the features of the youths with whom she had danced.

Phoebe found herself wishing she might dance with him. Then she sighed. No use of her aspiring for such a partner. How futile for her to think of such a thing!

Earnestly she looked over the girls who danced past, seeking for one who might strike *his* fancy. But, somehow, she didn't see any one who was—well, worthy of him.

She gazed at him again in admiration. He happened to intercept her glance, and she dropped her eyes with characteristic shyness. Confused, she stared at the opposite end of the hall, afraid to look again in his direction.

Suddenly, while the orchestra was in its most energetic mood, some one stopped beside her chair. She glanced up. It was the youth she admired!

"Would you care to dance with me?" he asked her easily, placing one hand on the back of her chair as he bent over toward her.

"Oh, y-yes—surely," gulped Phoebe. Hastily she got to her feet; her cheeks tingled with the color that sprang into them.

With mingled feelings of fright, pride and awe, she started off with him. She regretted that she was not taller; her dark head scarcely came to his shoulder. But she followed his steps so easily that it did not seem to matter.

All too soon the music ceased.

They were near the small tables. He took her arm. "Shall we stop here?

Will you have a drink—or some ice cream?"

"Yes, I'd like to—if you want to," responded Phoebe.

He smiled and held out a chair for her. She looked at him closely as he gave their orders to the white-coated boy. Yes, he was a few years older than the youths Winona knew, and more serious, even though he smiled.

Phoebe was ill at ease, wondering how she could talk to him, what she could say.

"I haven't seen you here before," he informed her, with a glance of interest. "But you dance as if you were born to it. Are you a stranger in town?"

"We've lived here almost a year. Moved in from"—she was about to say "the sticks," but caught herself in time—"from the country, after my mother died."

He nodded understandingly.

"This is a wonderful place, don't you think?" Phoebe asked, after a pause.

"Wonderful?" He smiled. "This?" He dismissed their surroundings with an expressive gesture. "What do you like about it?"

"The music—it's so beautiful," she responded earnestly.

"That? It's the first time I've ever heard it called 'beautiful.'" Yet his eyes were kind. "Oh, it's all very well to dance to," he conceded. "But, child, have you ever heard real music?"

"I—I guess not," she said humbly.

"Do you happen to have a phonograph at home?" he asked her.

"Yes." She brightened. "Mother got one a couple of years ago—with coupons. But there were only six little records came with it. Songs, mostly," she confessed.

"I'd like to—" He paused and looked at her. "I wonder if you'd care to hear something really good?"

"Oh, I would!" Phoebe beamed.

"Do you know where the phonograph shop is, in this block?"

"Yes." She nodded, wonderingly.

"I'd like to take you down there and have you hear—well, some different music. Would you go?"

Phoebe looked around for Winona, but she could not discover her.

There would be no harm in going out for a little while with this man. If there were he would not ask her, Phoebe knew beyond doubting. Her heart told her this—and more. She realized that, should he ask her, she would follow him anywhere.

Her glance returned to his face. "Yes," she assented.

AT the phonograph shop her companion spoke assuredly to the young man who greeted him. "Just took a notion to drop in for a moment and hear some records."

"Good!" The clerk was cordial. "Just help yourself, Elliot." He returned to the work of arranging a display of sheet music.

Elliot. So that was his name. Perhaps Winona could tell her who he was. Phoebe followed him into the glass-inclosed music booth. She sat down while he picked out records from a cabinet.

In the ensuing half hour Phoebe heard music of which she had never dreamed. She realized what he had meant by something different from jazz. This was heavenly! She was shaken, exalted.

Finally there came the Meditation from "Thais," played by a great violinist.

The throbbing, passionate strains,

the haunting sadness seemed to penetrate every fiber of her being, leaving an aching longing that was vague, formless. She wanted to cry.

"What do you think of that?" her companion asked.

"It's — it's—" She could not tell him, but there was sufficient answer in her shining eyes.

He regarded her silently for a second. Then he queried: "Does your phonograph still play all right?"

"Why, yes, I think so."

"I'm going to give you this record."

"Oh, I couldn't—"

"Of course you can," he overruled her, putting the record into an envelope.

They came out of the booth. He drew some money from his pocket and paid the clerk for the record.

When they were out in the street, Phoebe tried to voice her thanks, but he made light of the gift and cut short her protestations.

"But you don't even know who I am—or do you?" asked Phoebe.

"No, I don't." He smiled. "You might tell me—"

"I'm Phoebe Harris," she said diffidently.

"Phoebe," he repeated. "That's a nice, old-fashioned name. And where do you live?"

She hesitated, a dread chilling her at that question. When he knew he wouldn't have anything more to do with her, probably. Yet she might as well tell him; he could find out easily enough, no doubt.

"Up across the railroad," she said, facing him frankly, but with fear in her heart.

"In Soupbone Hollow?" he asked lightly.

"Yes," she admitted, wincing. Then she began timidly: "But you—"

"I'm Grant Elliot," he told her.

They were again at the dance hall entrance. Elliot stopped outside.

"Some one brought you here?" he questioned.

"A girl I know."

"I—would you like me to take you home?"

Phoebe's heart stood still. Would she like to! But—she didn't dare. Her stepfather— And she was ashamed to have Elliot know that she had sneaked out of the house to come to this dance. What would he think of her?

"I—I think maybe I'd better—go home with my friend, to-night," she murmured.

As she spoke, she glanced at him fearfully, hoping that he would not be offended. If he only knew how much she hated to refuse him!

Perhaps a hint of her real feelings was revealed in her face, for he did not urge her further.

"I see," he said. "Well, that's all right." He smiled down at her. "I don't think I'll dance any more to-night." He took her arm. "Come on. I'll take you back upstairs."

Silently Phoebe climbed the steps beside him. When they were just inside the door he asked:

"I'll see you here soon again?"

"Oh, yes—I hope so," she replied.

"Well—good night."

"Good-by," she murmured.

She watched his figure disappear quickly into the hallway; then she turned to look for Winona. It must be getting late. The thought that her stepfather might discover her absence returned to torment Phoebe.

Winona came to her quickly. "Where you been, Phoebe? I thought I'd lost you."

"I'm sorry, Win. We'd better go,

hadn't we? Wait till we're outside, and I'll—"

"All right. Come on!"

They started out, arm in arm.

"Where did you get the record?" Winona asked when they were in the street.

As they hurried along Phoebe told of her evening's adventure.

"Grant Elliot!" exclaimed Winona. "Sure, I know who he is. I've danced with him. He's at the Tokio often. Never see him go with any girl."

At Winona's words something danced in Phoebe's heart. Could it be true that he didn't have a girl?

"He's with the Winfield *Republican*," continued Winona. "A reporter, Jackson told me."

Phoebe winced. Her stepfather—his name was generally in the police court news after pay days. "Fined for intoxication."

She said good night to Winona at the corner, and fearfully approached her home. Unnoticed and unheard, she scrambled in the window.

From an adjoining room came the sound of her stepfather's heavy breathing. She undressed quickly and slipped into bed, to dream of the evening.

PHOEBE put a new needle on the tiny little talking machine that had been dignified by the name of phonograph. With reverent care she placed the record Grant Elliot had given her on the machine.

She forgot her fear. "Don't you dare!" she cried

Then she sat down and closed her eyes, while the music carried her away from her surroundings to a region of warmth, sunshine, beauty.

And as she listened there always returned to her the memory of that magic hour in the phonograph shop. With closed eyes she could imagine Elliot beside her again.

This was her greatest pleasure when alone, especially in the evenings, waiting for her stepfather—like tonight, afraid that he would come home in an ugly mood.

Enthralled by the music, she did not hear him enter the house; suddenly his

bulky figure in the doorway startled her. She sprang to her feet, dismayed, trembling.

His eyes glinted narrowly above his flushed cheeks as he lurched over to the phonograph. Clumsily he stopped the machine and lifted the needle, scratching the record.

Phoebe, panic-stricken, twisted her hands nervously, while the half-intoxicated man picked up the record and held it up to read the inscription.

"Where in blazes didja get this?" he growled. "Two dollars and a half, it says. Wadda you mean, buying this?"

"I—I didn't—I didn't buy it." She shrank back, putting the oilcloth-covered table between them. She could not tell him the truth.

"Where'd you get it, then?" He glared at her.

Phoebe's eyes dropped under his scrutiny.

"I know! You stole it some place!"

"No—no!" she said weakly.

"Don't try to lie to me! Just for that—"

He drew back his arm, the record clenched in his coarse fingers.

Phoebe divined his purpose and momentarily lost her fear of his wrath. "Don't!" she cried. "Don't you dare!"

But he threw the record against the wall, smashing it to bits.

"I'll learn you, you little—"

The sight of his liquor-reddened eyes terrified the girl. As he staggered toward her she thrust a chair in his path, and he stumbled, fell prone. His angry epithets followed her as she darted out of the house.

Heedless of the beauty of the June night, she ran along. Out of the tumult of her mind crystallized the firm resolve not to go back.

But where could she run away to? She had no friends except Winona. And even if Winona's family would let her stay to-night, her stepfather would come and get her to-morrow. They could not keep her from him.

No, they couldn't help. In her hysterical flight she passed her friend's house without slackening her pace.

Oh, if only Grant Elliot could aid her! Yet she knew it was foolish for her to think of him. She had not seen him since the night he had given her the phonograph record; only once had she managed to go to the Tokio again, and that evening he had not been there.

And in the daytime she was not out much, except to deliver washings. It wasn't likely that she should meet him then. She would have been ashamed if she had.

Besides, he might not have given her a thought again, after he'd learned who she was and where she lived. Soupbone Hollow! It was funny—just trying to imagine Grant Elliot having a girl who lived there! His girl should live in one of those fine new mansions in the south end.

Phoebe laughed hysterically through her tears as she sped breathlessly along dark quiet streets, too miserable to be afraid of wandering alone in the night.

WHEN she became calm again she was on a winding road that led over a hill. The lights of the town were just behind her in the valley.

Without a thought of turning back she trudged sturdily along the much-traveled highway. She wished that she might be offered a ride in one of the passing vehicles.

A motor truck, slowing down along a narrow stretch of the road to let two

touring cars roar past, gave her an opportunity.

She dashed to the rear of the truck, and with some difficulty clambered on and seated herself on a small box. A jumble of crates and cartons hid her from the driver's view.

She determined to ride as far as possible, for each moment she was being taken farther away from Winfield — from Soupbone Hollow. The truck lumbered on through two small settlements without stopping. At length they came to the outskirts of a mining camp, and she sat up, alert, waiting to see if this place was their destination.

Presently the vehicle slowed down, and turned off the main road into a cross street. Phoebe jumped off as the truck came to a halt at the rear of a general store.

Walking away swiftly, she wondered what she should do next. She couldn't stay out all night. It was a late hour for job hunting, but she must try. There must be restaurants here; one of them might give her something to do.

If she could earn just a little money—enough to go on farther away from her stepfather. She would be safer across the State line, in Danville, which was a larger place than Winfield.

Keeping a tight rein on her courage, Phoebe walked along boldly. But she wondered what she should say if any one accosted her.

She made out the words, "Maysville Restaurant," painted on the side of a large frame building looming up ahead. Faintly she heard the sound of music as she approached.

From the opposite direction a man swung unsteadily down the walk. He careened toward her, and she stepped aside, but he reached out and caught her arm. He leered at her maudlinly; she was terribly afraid.

With a smothered scream she twisted her arm out of his grasp and darted into the restaurant building, swinging the door shut in his face.

Inside, she gazed about a large room and tried to comprehend the unfamiliar scene that confronted her. There were men at square tables, and couples dancing. Shrill voices and laughter cut through swirls of smoke.

Suddenly she distinguished a familiar figure at one of the tables. She stared with widened eyes. It was Grant Elliot!

A surge of relief swept over her at the sight of him sitting there alone. She felt safe.

The drunken man had followed her in and was mouthing something beside her. Half sobbing, Phoebe ran toward Elliot. He stared in amazement at her for a second; then his eyes lighted with recognition. "Why, it's—Phoebe—little Phoebe!"

Then his astonished gaze comprehended her pursuer. His features hardened, and he rose to his feet.

Meeting Elliot's glare, the intruder hesitated, almost cowered. At that moment a woman of commanding presence brushed by Phoebe and placed herself between the two men. She confronted the stranger, ordering in cold, even tones that brooked no argument, "Get—out!"

SCARCELY waiting until he had sauntered unsteadily away, the woman turned her back upon him. She was twice Phoebe's age, a deep brunette with arresting features. She must be the proprietress, Phoebe thought, as she stood timidly at Elliot's side.

For an instant the woman regarded them with a puzzled frown.

"What's it all about?" she asked.

"I don't know, Alma," Elliot said. "This is a friend of mine—Phoebe Harris, from Winfield."

Phoebe twisted her hands silently. She did not know how pitifully young and helpless she appeared.

The woman called Alma put an arm around Phoebe with surprising gentleness. "Don't be scared."

Phoebe, reassured, grew calm. As a summer breeze whirls and dies in a breath, so her fright ebbed from her. She remembered her original purpose in seeking this restaurant, and turned to the woman. "I—I thought I might get a job here," she spoke tentatively. "Do you need any one—"

"Oh, *you* couldn't work here," Alma cut in quickly.

"No, of course not!" exclaimed Elliot. "You've no business—" He paused. "Come on. We'll get out. Then you can tell me—whatever is the trouble." He was regarding her with serious, intent eyes.

Obediently Phoebe kept to his side as he strode out in apparent haste to get her away.

Her hand clung to his arm, while they walked away from the camp's main road, down a lane between rows of quiet cottages.

Elliot listened gravely while she told him of the night's events that had led to their meeting. "Then I saw you," she concluded. "I never expected to see you—" Her words trailed off questioningly.

"I was over here looking up a story," he said. "I'm in Danville now. Took a job on the afternoon paper there two weeks ago."

"Oh," said Phoebe. Danville—that was where she wanted to go! She was about to tell him her plan when he continued:

"I didn't find you again at the Tokio before I left town. I was going to come over to Winfield and try again some night, but I hadn't been able to, yet."

Her heart leaped at his words. He had not forgotten her!

They had passed the outskirts of the mining camp now, and were on the country road. The sky was crowded with stars that threw down a misty silver light.

Phoebe was enthralled by the age-old, ever-new magic of the night, lying thickly about them. She felt strangely free and happy, and thrilled at the contact of her hand on Elliot's arm.

His voice brought her back. "To think that the record I gave you should have caused you all this trouble! I'm sorry."

"Oh, it wasn't your fault," she protested swiftly.

"But I'm responsible, all right," he replied. "I wonder if it wasn't meant, anyway."

Phoebe hung eagerly upon his words. The moment seemed a whirling dream.

"You don't know me so well yet," he said slowly. "But we'll change that now!" His arm went around her. "Phoebe," he whispered; "dear little Phoebe!"

Slowly she raised her head and looked up into his face. In his eyes she saw a response to the glow in her own. Then he bent his head and his lips found hers.

She was shaken to the depths of her being by the ecstasy of his kiss; the starry sky swam before her eyes when she reopened them.

"I love you, Phoebe! Oh, little

dear, do you love me? I wouldn't have asked you so soon, but now—"

"I do!" she cried. "Oh, I do!" She hid her face in his shoulder and clung to him.

How could she ever stand such happiness!

"We'll be married in Danville—" he was saying.

Through a blissful haze his words came to her vaguely, as he planned aloud. What did details matter at the moment? She only knew—as she had always known—that she would follow him anywhere that he might ask her.

Now, she realized with a sudden, sharp joy, Soupbone Hollow was forever behind her. She was going on, into a new world—a world of warmth, and beauty, and love.

"Sweetheart!" His voice penetrated her happy dreams. "Do you know, when I first saw you I thought—there's a girl for me!"

"I am — all yours — forever!" said Phoebe.

Dream Knight

WHEN I was small
I had a dream of a knight
So tall,
He could reach to the stars
And pluck a few—
That was the least
He could do!

Yes. Now
They promise
The sun beside,
And a bit of moon
The night I'm bride.

Ah! If
They'd only reach down
For a handful of earth,
Brown and humble and bare,
And give it to me for a mudpie or two
I'd marry them then and there!

—*Beth Brown*

Thwarted Love

Hoped for, dreamed for! Yet romance offered only disillusionment to Lida Nobody

By Edna Ettinger

AFTER she crossed the third street, Lida Wilson was positive that she was being followed!

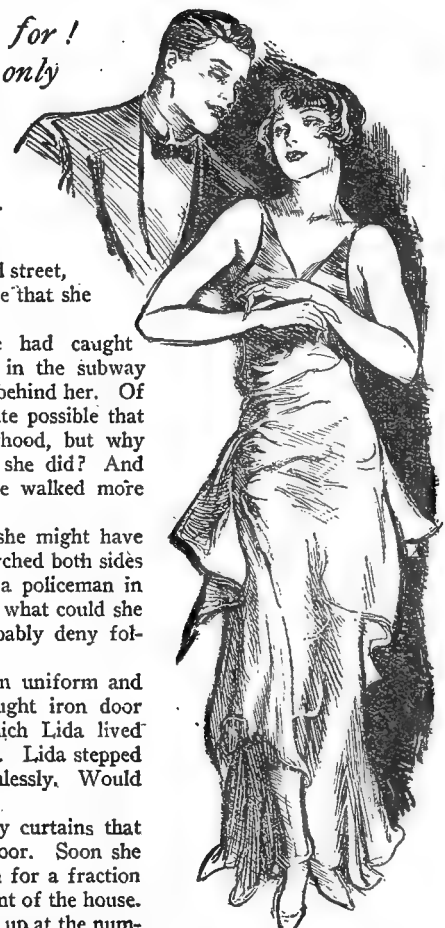
The man whom she had caught glancing at her surreptitiously in the subway was now walking several paces behind her. Of course, she reasoned, it was quite possible that he lived in the same neighborhood, but why did he quicken his pace when she did? And why did he fall back when she walked more slowly?

If it had been late at night she might have been badly frightened. She searched both sides of the street, but there wasn't a policeman in sight. And even if she saw one what could she tell him? The man would probably deny following her.

Henry, the doorman, in green uniform and brass buttons, opened the wrought iron door of the apartment house in which Lida lived with her friend Jeanne Heppner. Lida stepped into the house and waited breathlessly. Would the man dare to follow her?

She peered through the heavy curtains that covered the plate glass in the door. Soon she saw the man coming. Not even for a fraction of a second did he hesitate in front of the house. But she did notice that he looked up at the number over the arch from the corners of his eyes.

Then she was right in suspecting him. He



"Don't you think I'm lucky?" he teased

had been following her. But who was this mysterious man? And why did he want to know where she lived?

As she stepped into the elevator, she wondered if she should tell Jeanne about him? She decided not. She would be on the alert to-morrow and watch for the man. If she saw him again, then she would report it.

Jeanne was in the kitchenette of the apartment when Lida entered. Although only twenty-one, Jeanne was a very serious young person. She was rather pretty, with big gray eyes and jet black hair, which she parted in the exact center.

Lida was two years younger. Her exquisitely formed body and her marvelously pretty face could have won her a place on the stage very easily. Instead, she chose the commercial world. She was secretary to the vice president of a down town bank.

Off came the little felt hat from her reddish-brown hair as she turned her pansy eyes to Jeanne. "Dinner ready, dear?" she asked.

"In just a few moments," Jeanne answered.

The girls took turns at cooking. They found it much cheaper than eating in restaurants, and the money thus saved provided them with extra luxuries.

"I'm in a hurry," Lida announced, her scarlet lips forming a happy smile. "I've got a date to-night."

"With Quentin Baker?" Jeanne asked.

"Yes," Lida answered proudly. "He dropped in at the bank this afternoon."

Jeanne frowned.

"What's the matter?" Lida demanded. "Don't you like him?"

"Why, yes, I do. He's got everything. Tall, handsome and rich. But I think you'll be much happier in the end if you'll strike him off your list before you fall in love with him."

"But, Jeanne, dear, I am in love with him!"

Jeanne dropped her work. A sad expression flitted across her face. "I hope not," she said very seriously. "No good could come of it."

Lida laughed. "Oh, you darling pessimist! Can't you think of rainbows once in a while? I really think Quentin is falling in love with me, too. And then—"

"Mr. Preston Baker will enter upon the scene," Jeanne interrupted, "and all you'll have will be a broken heart."

"That's silly," Lida protested. "Quentin's father isn't such a terrible ogre."

"I happen to know him," Jeanne said coldly. "I once worked in his office. He's one of the richest men in the city. And if you think he's going to let his son marry somebody's secretary, you're mistaken."

Lida felt hurt. "Don't you think I'm good enough for him?"

Jeanne was sorry. She walked over and put her arm around Lida. "I didn't mean that," she assured her. "If anything, you're even too good for him. You come from fine stock. Your father was a very distinguished college professor. But that means nothing to Mr. Preston Baker. His god is money. Money that brings him power. He'd want his son to marry a very rich girl. In fact—I hate to tell you this, but you should know it—he wants Quentin to marry Marcia Lawton, the only daughter of Gilbert Lawton, who is also one of the richest men in the city. In that way Mr. Baker expects to combine both fortunes, giving him more power."

"I know about Marcia Lawton," Lida said. "Quentin told me."

"He did?" Jeanne asked in surprise.

"Yes. You see, he is honest with me. He told me that Marcia is no more anxious to marry him than he is to marry her. They both feel that marriages should be a matter of love and not parental arrangement."

"Well," Jeanne remarked, "for your sake, dear, I hope everything turns out right. Let's have our dinner."

AS Lida changed her clothes, Jeanne's words kept repeating themselves to her. Would Quentin's father stand in the way of their love? Would it be best to take Jeanne's advice and give him up?

"No, no," she cried inwardly. "I can't give him up. I love him too much."

It was only six months ago that she had met Quentin in the bank through a business transaction. The moment they looked into each other's eyes it seemed as if a spark had been ignited. They were drawn together as if some superior power had arranged that those two should be one.

Even though he had not yet declared himself in so many words, she knew in her heart that he loved her.

They went out together quite often, but Quentin never took her to his home or introduced her to his parents. Her confidence in him kept her silent. Perhaps he was waiting for a favorable moment? She cherished the hope that she would be able to win his parents' love.

THREE short rings of the electric bell informed Lida that Quentin was at the door.

"I'll answer it," Jeanne offered.

He was a splendid looking chap, this Quentin Baker. About twenty-five years old, with dark eyes that twinkled, and dark hair that curled back from a straight forehead.

A glance would never have revealed that he was the heir to a tremendous fortune. He was natural, unassuming, and utterly devoid of pretension.

"Hello, Jeanne," he called, as he removed the black felt hat he wore with his evening clothes. "I brought you a book. The one you mentioned the last time I was up here."

"I'm sorry you did that," Jeanne said. "I'll be afraid to talk with you around."

Lida came in and Quentin's eyes shone with admiration. She looked adorable in the powder blue gown that enhanced the whiteness of her skin.

"You ought to congratulate me," Quentin said to Lida.

"What for?" she asked.

"For getting such a pretty girl to go out with me. I guess I was born under a lucky star."

They went to the theater first. Then to a night club. In the taxi Quentin took hold of Lida's hand. "I don't want it to be too much of a surprise to you," he said, "so I'm tipping you off now. Dad and mother are going to be in the club. And you're going to meet them. They don't know it yet."

"But, Quentin, do you think I'm dressed right?"

"Of course. And you've never looked prettier than you do to-night. I'm awfully proud of you, Lida. And I'm sure they'll feel the same way."

Lida was nervous. After all, it's more or less of an ordeal for a young girl to meet her sweetheart's parents. There is always the fear that she may not be liked. And Jeanne had been filling her mind with such unpleasant stories of Quentin's father.

The idea of meeting them in a

public place wasn't altogether agreeable either. It would have been much nicer if her lover had taken her to his home. He would too, she felt, if she had insisted. But knowing what his father's wishes were, she believed it best to let Quentin arrange matters in his own way.

He took her arm as they entered the club. His eyes searched the room until they found his parents at a conspicuous table. He pretended great surprise when he reached them.

"Why, mother," he began. "Hello, dad. This is great, finding you here. I want you to meet a dear friend of mine. Miss Lida Wilson—my mother —my dad. Let's make it a family party."

He tucked a chair under Lida and seated himself opposite her. To prevent an awkward pause, Quentin kept up a rapid fire conversation until the waiter appeared and he gave the order.

Mrs. Baker, Lida thought, had an attractive face. Quentin resembled her. She was just as natural and unassuming as her son.

She spoke to Lida as if she were an old intimate. It warmed Lida's heart, and it made Quentin beam with pleasure. But during the evening, when Mrs. Baker patted Lida's hand and said, "I think you're a darling," Lida noticed that Mr. Baker frowned.

Lida felt that she had won Quentin's mother, but his father was cool and aloof. She tried to interest him in his favorite topics, knowing full well that she was capable of discussing financial matters intelligently, but he refused to thaw. He looked at her coldly as if she were an interloper, his shaggy brows drooping over his steel-gray eyes.

Quentin was gay on the way home. "I knew they'd fall for you," he told her. "You've sold yourself to mother one hundred per cent."

"But I'm afraid I registered zero with your father."

"Oh, no. Dad is always that way. The only time he smiles is when he adds another corporation to his list. You'll see, in a few days mother will send you an invitation to spend the week-end with us." He put his arm around her gently. "I love you, dear. You're the sweetest little girl in the world. Do you love me, honey?"

"More than anything in life." Her eyes shone into his.

He lowered his head and their lips met. An exquisite thrill swept through Lida. She put her arms around his neck and held him close to her, as if she never wanted to let him go. He was made for her and she was made for him. They must always be together.

"And when you spend the week-end with us," he added later, "we'll make all the preparations for our wedding."

LIDA was gloriously happy the next day. But, in spite of the rosy picture she painted, Jeanne did not share her enthusiasm.

"I suppose you'll call me a pessimist again," Jeanne said, "but I'm afraid you won't have easy sailing. I think it would take a miracle to make Quentin's father agree to the marriage."

A few days passed and there was no invitation from Mrs. Baker. Lida was a bit downhearted. But she comforted herself with the thought that Mrs. Baker might be waiting until Quentin got back from his trip to Pittsburg.

But when Quentin returned he told Lida that his mother intended redecorating the home and for that reason had not extended the invitation.

The following day Lida had some shopping to do and decided to use her lunch hour for that purpose. She took the subway uptown and dropped into one of the department stores.

She wasted no time making her purchases and then left the store. The moment she reached the street a rough hand clamped on her shoulder.

Frightened, she looked up. She saw a tall man looking down at her with scowling eyes. "We caught you this time, young lady," he said in a gruff voice.

She tried to brush his hand off, but he held her firmly. "I'll call a policeman if you don't let me go," she said.

He opened his coat a bit and she saw the flash of a nickel badge. "I'm one of the store detectives," he said. "And I saw you steal that wrist watch."

Watch? He must have mistaken her for some one else. She had not even looked at wrist watches.

In her distress she turned around, then she started. Near the door stood a man with a dark complexion and cold, penetrating eyes. His lower jaw protruded, giving him a sinister look. In an instant she recognized him. Here was the man who had followed her home a few weeks ago!

Lida turned to the detective. "Do you realize you are making a serious charge against me?" she asked. "And that I can sue the store for it?"

"I never make mistakes, miss," he said coldly. "I saw you take the watch and I saw you put it in your pocket."

Lida smiled. How foolish that was. Why, she could prove to him very easily that she was not the thief. She'd turn her pockets inside out and he'd see for himself that she had no watch.

But when she put her hand in her pocket her blood ran cold. She was sure her pockets had been empty when she left the house, and yet one of the pockets was not empty now. She drew out the object. It was a diamond wrist watch!

"Well," the detective remarked, "I guess I caught you with the goods that time."

"But I didn't take it," she protested. "I don't know how it got into my pocket."

"You can tell that to the judge."

"Oh!" she cried. "I swear I didn't take it! I wasn't near the jewelry counter. It'll be a terrible disgrace if I'm arrested. Please let me go. You have the watch."

"I'm sorry," he said without feeling. "You've got to come along with me. If you're nice I'll take you down in a taxi. But if you raise a disturbance I'll send for the police wagon."

LIDA trembled like a leaf. There was a sickening feeling in the pit of her stomach.

She found it almost impossible to comprehend. She was being arrested as a thief! And in her heart and soul she knew she was innocent. But could she make others believe?

She thought of the man who had followed her home. Could he possibly be connected with this? Some one had deliberately put the watch in her pocket, so that she would be arrested the moment she left the store.

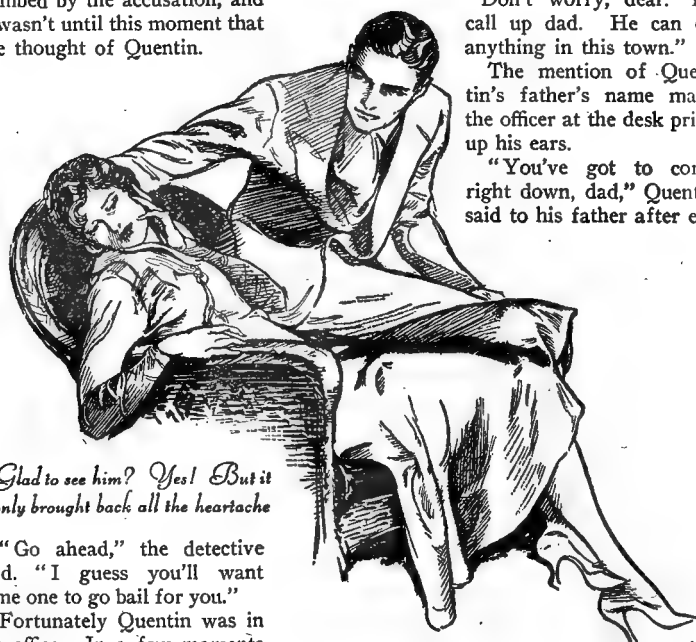
There was only one thing to do. She must go with the detective and if she were brought up before a judge tell him the truth.

"I'll go with you," she said to the detective.

Lida's face was burning with shame when they entered the police station.

The officer at the desk eyed her sharply.

"Please," she said to the detective, "will you allow me to make a telephone call?" Her mind had been numbed by the accusation, and it wasn't until this moment that she thought of Quentin.



Glad to see him? Yes! But it only brought back all the heartache

"Go ahead," the detective said. "I guess you'll want some one to go bail for you."

Fortunately Quentin was in his office. In a few moments he came rushing into the station hatless.

"I didn't steal the watch, Quentin," she assured him again and again.

"I believe you, dear. I know you didn't." Then he turned to the detective. "What is the price of that watch?"

"Four hundred dollars. She picked a good one."

"Just leave her out of the conversation," Quentin said sharply. "I'll buy that watch and I'll give you an equal amount if you'll drop the matter."

"Sorry," the detective answered. "I can't drop the matter. She'll probably get six months or a year for this job."

Lida turned pale at the thought of prison. Quentin patted her shoulder.

"Don't worry, dear. I'll call up dad. He can do anything in this town."

The mention of Quentin's father's name made the officer at the desk prick up his ears.

"You've got to come right down, dad," Quentin said to his father after explaining the circumstances. "You must get her out of it."

"I'm very busy now," his father answered. "And besides, why should I be mixed up with a thing like that?"

"I want you to do it for me, dad. You know it's seldom that I ask any favors."

Preston Baker agreed to come down. Because of his wealth and his power in the city, he was extended every courtesy. He was ushered into a private room where he could discuss the matter with his son.

Lida waited with the detective, wondering what would happen to her. She knew that Preston Baker disliked her. She knew from the few remarks he had made in her presence that he believed she did steal the watch. Would he help her?

QUENTIN spoke rapidly: "You must get her out of this."

"And suppose I do?" his father asked. "Will you continue to see her?"

"Why not? She didn't steal it."

"I see." Preston Baker smoothed his iron-gray mustache. "You're so hopelessly infatuated that you can't see the truth. But I do. I suppose you'd even insist that your mother invite this girl, who is accused of shoplifting, to spend a week-end in our home and meet all our friends. That won't happen. I wash my hands of this. I'm going to let her take her medicine."

"Please, dad! Don't you realize what it means for a girl to go to prison, especially if she's innocent?"

"That's what you think. I don't. There's nothing more to be said."

Quentin caught his father's arm.

"Listen, dad, I'll do anything if you get her out of this."

"Will you promise to break off with her and never see her?"

Quentin's face twisted in pain. "That's a hard bargain you're driving," he said bitterly.

"I'm only doing it for your own good, son. Some day you may thank me for it."

Quentin eyed his father sharply. He was just as ruthless in matters of love as in business.

But what was Quentin to do? He could not let the girl he loved go to prison!

"All right, dad," he said slowly. "I'll give her up."

Lida saw them coming out of the room in which they had been closeted. She noticed that Preston Baker had a happy smile on his face, but Quentin looked very sad.

While his father strode to the telephone to tell the head of the department store to drop the charge, Quentin walked slowly to Lida.

"The case will be dropped," he said in a toneless voice.

"Oh, I knew you'd be able to do something," Lida cried thankfully. "I must thank your father too."

"Not now. Please don't."

The detective was the first to leave. Then Preston Baker turned to Quentin: "Come, son."

Lida walked out with them. In the street they stopped.

"I'll only be a minute, dad," Quentin said.

Preston Baker got into his car, parked at the curb.

Quentin held out his hand. "Good-by, Lida," he said, in a voice that sounded as if it came from a tomb.

It frightened her, and she looked up at him. "Good-by?" she repeated.

"Yes." He nodded his head sadly. "It's good-by."

"Quentin"—she seized the lapels of his coat and shook him—"you don't believe that I stole the watch, do you?"

"No, but you could never have convinced any one else of your innocence. It's good-by, Lida. I can never see you again. That's the price I paid for your freedom."

HOW Lida got back to her own apartment she never knew. Her eyes were blinded with tears as she walked along the streets. She couldn't go back to the bank in her

present condition. Her only thoughts were of home, where she would be alone. Where she could think and realize what had happened.

She threw herself on the bed and cried as if her heart would break. Quentin was lost to her forever. His father must have believed she was a thief.

When it seemed as if she had no more tears left, she rose from the bed and sat near the window. She looked out, but saw nothing. Just one thing was fixed in her mind. Quentin was gone forever.

Later, Jeanne came home. With lips drawn tight she listened to the story Lida sobbed.

"It was all planned beforehand," Jeanne declared. "Preston Baker must have had detectives following you for a long time. They learned your habits and waited for this chance. They probably got some pickpocket to drop the watch in your pocket. The store detective worked hand in hand with the detective hired by Preston Baker—the man with the dark complexion, who followed you home."

"It's very hard to believe." Lida shook her head. "I can't imagine a man like Mr. Baker stooping to anything as contemptible as that."

"You can't change my opinion," Jeanne asserted. "Don't you see that Preston Baker has accomplished exactly what he wanted? He has made Quentin promise to give you up as the price of your freedom. Men will stoop to all sorts of things when they're driven by ambition. He didn't want you to marry Quentin. It would spoil all his plans."

Jeanne paused. "I wonder what would happen if you told all that to Quentin?" she added.

"I shan't," Lida cried. "He would never believe it of his father. He thinks the world of him. And besides, I could never marry Quentin now, knowing that his father disliked me so much. We'd never be happy. I must forget him. I must forget that I ever loved him."

Lida, however, soon found that love cannot be torn out of the heart so easily. Try as she would, she couldn't keep Quentin out of her thoughts. Tears would come to her eyes when she looked at the chair in which he usually sat when in her apartment. On the days when she had been accustomed to meeting him, a heavy depression settled upon her.

Jeanne did her best to cheer her, but it was useless.

For three weeks Quentin avoided coming into the bank. Then, one day he came. His eyes met Lida's and he smiled at her — a wistful smile that touched her heart.

When he came out of the president's office she expected him to leave the bank. Instead, she saw him coming toward her and her heart pounded like mad.

"I want you to lunch with me," he said.

Lida didn't know what to answer.

"Please do," he pleaded. "I must talk to you."

He waited until the clock struck twelve. Lida put on her hat and went with him to a small restaurant in a side street. He said nothing until the waiter brought their order and left. Then he reached across the table and took her hand. She noticed that his was trembling.

"We can't go on this way, Lida," he said abruptly. "You've got to marry me."

"But you promised your father—"

"I know. I've always kept my

promises, but I can't keep this one. I love you. I can't give you up. You've got to marry me!"

"No, no," she protested quickly. "We mustn't. Your father would never forgive you. He'd disinherit you."

"Would that make any difference to you?" he asked in surprise.

"I'm not thinking of the money, Quentin," she assured him. "I'm only thinking of you. Why, I'd gladly keep on working if we could only be together. It's the estrangement that I wouldn't want. I'd hate to feel that because of me you couldn't go to your own home. He might even forbid your mother to see you. You'd have to give up every one because of me. That's a big price to pay."

"But you're worth it," he insisted.

"You may not think so later," she said. "That matter of the watch. It was kept out of the newspapers, but suppose it should be told? Your friends might not believe I was innocent. If I should marry you without your parents' consent, I'd just be spoiling your life. I can't do it, Quentin. I love you too much."

"I think you're wrong, dearest. After you're my wife, my dad will have to accept you."

"No, I'm afraid he'd always hate me. He wants you to marry Marcia."

"I'll never marry her. If I can't marry you, I'll not marry any one. Won't you please say yes?"

But she shook her head.

"I can't, Quentin. I'll never be your wife unless I know I'm welcome."

LIFE seemed tragic to Lida. An orphan for years, she had always hoped that in the parents of the man she married she would find another father and mother. But it seemed as though the fates were conspiring against her.

"A change of scenery might do you a world of good," Jeanne suggested to her a few days later. "I was offered a position in Florida as general secretary in a country club. I'm supposed to give them an answer by Saturday. How would you like to go instead, Lida?"

"I'd hate to leave you," Lida answered. "You're the only one I have now—my only friend in the whole of the world."

"Well, as your friend, I'd advise you to take it. The tourist season will soon start. You'll meet lots of nice people there. I think it would be just the thing for you."

"I don't know," she said sadly. "I'll think it over. Are you sure you don't want it?"

"Positive. I had you in mind the moment I heard of it."

The sight of Quentin in the bank the next day helped Lida make up her mind. When he spoke to her she felt herself weakening. That decided her. She was afraid that if she stayed on he might induce her to elope with him. And it might all end in a lifetime of regret.

THE Swarthmore Country Club seemed, to Lida's city-weary eyes, ideal. Nowhere had she seen grass so green. Attractively bronzed young men and beautifully dressed young women were standing and lounging about as Lida arrived.

The manager of the club greeted her cordially and had one of the attendants show her to the room which was to be permanently hers. Later the manager explained her duties. She was to occupy the desk in his office.

After dinner Lida retired to her

room. From below she could hear the sound of the dance orchestra. There were mostly young people there—happy boys and girls—of her own age. It made her wonder if she would ever be happy. Would her problem ever be solved? Would she ever be able to marry Quentin with the whole-hearted approval of both his parents? It seemed as if she'd never have the man she loved.

At the end of the second week, while she was sitting on the piazza, she saw a young man drive up in a sport roadster. For the moment her heart stopped beating.

It was Quentin.

Lida realized that it was useless to go in, for he had recognized her immediately. He was coming up the path now with a quick and eager step. She felt sure that his coming couldn't be a coincidence. Jeanne must have told him where she was, although she had promised faithfully to keep the secret.

Of course Lida was glad to see him, but it only brought back all the heartbreak.

"Why did you follow me?" she asked.

"You know why," he answered. "It's because I love you. Besides, I didn't follow you here. I sent you here."

"You sent me?"

"Yes. I planned this with Jeanne and I had her induce you to take the job. We have a summer home about twenty miles from here. And I didn't like the idea of spending the whole summer without seeing you. So I arranged to have you not so far away. Dad and mother are here already, but you needn't worry about dad. He has an enemy in this club and never comes here."

"But there's no use our seeing each other," she said.

"Yes, there is," he insisted. "I'm still hoping to induce you to elope."

"Tell me the truth, Quentin," she said. "Have you spoken to your father about me?"

"Yes."

"And what did he say?"

"What you suspect."

"That he'd disinherit you and disown you?"

"Yes. But I'd give up everything for you, Lida. We could go away where no one knew us and start fresh. If you loved me you would do it."

"It's because I love you that I won't," she answered.

In the days that followed he tried to see her often, but she shut herself from him. She was thinking of going back to New York, but she realized that he would follow her.

One day as she stood on the piazza she saw Quentin drive by in his roadster with a beautiful girl beside him. Lida felt a pang of jealousy. Behind her one of the guests spoke: "Did you notice who went by?"

"Yes," was the answer. "It looked very much like Marcia Lawton. I didn't know she was down here."

"I suppose she's visiting the Bakers."

"I've heard that Mr. Baker is very anxious to have the two families merge. The matrimonial market is getting to be like the stock market."

Lida was upset for the rest of the day. She didn't want to lose Quentin. She loved him with all her heart. She wondered if she was right in her decision? After all, if he was willing to sacrifice everything for her, why shouldn't she take him? Couldn't her love make up to him for everything he would lose by marrying her?

She went to her room after dinner

to think, but the room was unbearably hot. So she left the club and walked up the road alone.

The moon was shining, but in many places it was hidden from the road by the thick foliage of the palm trees. As she walked along she tried to solve her problem. It was a question of considering herself or considering Quentin.

SUDDENLY she heard a sound behind her and quickly stepped off the road. Not a second too soon. A large truck, completely without lights, whizzed by at a terrific speed.

For the moment Lida was in a panic. If she had not heard the truck coming and stepped aside she would surely have been killed. It was a narrow escape and it left her shivering.

"It must be a bootlegger's truck," she said to herself. "That's why it had no lights. Not only do they break the law, but they endanger lives too."

She was about to turn back when she heard a loud crash in the distance. Then she saw a light pointing to the sky.

The truck must have hit a car, she thought, and overturned it. That must be one of the car's headlights shining upward. It was too far to run back to the country club for help, so she decided to run over and see if she could do anything. She was positive that the truck escaped from the scene and left its victims helpless.

She ran as quickly as she could on her high heels. It was just as she had suspected. A car was overturned and the truck was out of sight.

The ground was covered with shattered glass. A man in chauffeur's uniform lay on his back in the gully off the road. Lida listened to his heart and found that it was still beating.

Then she looked in the tonneau of the car. By the light of the moon she was able to distinguish the figure of a man. Quickly she opened the door. And with all her strength she dragged him out of the car and off the road to safety.

When she recognized the pale face with the iron-gray mustache she uttered a scream. It was Preston Baker, Quentin's father!

He had a great gash across his forehead. As she took a handkerchief from her dress to wipe it, she noticed that his wrist was cut and that he was bleeding profusely.

It looked very much as if an artery had been severed. There was only one way of stopping the flow of blood. She must make a tourniquet. But what could she use?

Her stocking!

In an instant she had her shoe off and a stocking. With a heavy knot she tied both ends of the stocking. Then she picked up a stick. She put the stocking around the bleeding wrist and by twisting the stick gradually tightened the stocking until the blood stopped flowing.

Then she sat holding the stick and praying that some car would pass by and help. For more than ten minutes she waited. Then help came. It was the manager of the country club going to town.

He had a friend with him. Together they picked up the chauffeur, who was now coming to his senses, and put him in their car. Then they picked up Preston Baker. The friend held the tourniquet while the manager drove.

"Do you want to come to the hospital with us?" the manager asked Lida.

"No," she answered. "I'm going back to my room."

She put on her shoe and, on unsteady feet, walked back to the country club.

LIDA sat in her office the next afternoon, still unnerved from the experience of the night before. When she tried to typewrite she found that her fingers trembled. She thought it strange. She had been so cool and calm while at the accident, and now that it was all over a reaction had set in.

A voice outside said: "You have a Miss Wilson here. I'd like to see her."

She heard the desk clerk answer, "She's right in that office, sir."

Presently the door of Lida's office opened and Preston Baker came in. Evidently the name Miss Wilson had meant nothing to him, for he showed great surprise when he recognized Lida.

"Are you the Miss Wilson who saved my life?" he asked.

"Well, I happened to be there to help you. I think you exaggerate a little when you say that I saved your life."

"The doctor thought so," he said. "He also said it was very clever of you to make a tourniquet out of a silk stocking. He thinks I would have bled to death if it weren't for you."

"Some one else would have come along and done the same thing."

Preston Baker cleared his throat. "I didn't expect to find that you were the Miss Wilson. I came to offer a reward."

"Thank you," Lida said. "I don't expect anything and hope it won't be offered."

Preston Baker stroked his mustache with the hand that was not bandaged. For a man who was always in control of every situation he seemed very ill at ease.

"I suppose you recognized me when you were helping me?" he remarked.

"Yes, I did."

"Hm!" he grunted. "I wonder if it flashed through your mind that by not helping me you could have removed the barrier between you and my son?"

Lida rose from her desk angrily. "I think that's a horrid thing to say, Mr. Baker. I wish you'd apologize and leave."

He looked at her startled. "Why—I—I'm very sorry. I didn't mean to offend you."

"I accept your apology, Mr. Baker. There is nothing more to be said. You've thanked me and the incident is closed."

But Preston Baker did not rise from his seat. For several moments he sat there studying Lida. He was seeing her now for the first time without prejudice. He saw a beautiful girl with reddish-brown hair and purple-blue eyes, who had character and courage. A girl who made him feel that she was his equal.

"Miss Wilson," he said, "in spite of what you say, I feel that I owe my life to you. And I've decided not to stand between you and Quentin. Will you have dinner with us to-night?"

"No, I'd rather not."

He looked at her in amazement. "But I thought you loved Quentin?"

"I do," she answered slowly. "But I don't want him as a reward. Please don't feel that you're under obligation to me, Mr. Baker."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he exclaimed, looking at her with admiration. "If I had a daughter I'd wish that she were like you."

"That's quite a compliment."

"I mean it. It's only now that I'm learning who you are and what you are. I admire you tremendously. Mrs.

Baker thought well of you the moment she met you. But I admit I was prejudiced. I had other plans for my son. I wanted more power." He closed his eyes for a minute. "If it weren't for you I would have been a thing of the past now—without the power of a fly. But we'll forget that."

He walked over to her chair and put his hand on her shoulder. "I believe your first name is Lida, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, Lida, I mean this honestly and earnestly. I'm very sorry for the trouble I've caused you. Mrs. Baker and myself will be very proud to have you marry Quentin. We'll be very happy to have you for our daughter. Now will you come to dinner with us to-night?"

She rose from the chair and kissed him. "You're a darling."

"Well, I'll try to be in the future. Then we'll see you to-night?"

"To-night!" she repeated. "That's a long way off. Couldn't I go with you now—dad?"

He smiled at her happily. "I'm afraid Quentin will be jealous of me. I'm falling in love with you myself."

Quentin was at the window as the car drew up in front of the Baker mansion. He needed only one look to know that everything was all right. He ran over to the car and took her in his arms as she got out. Then he kissed her until she was breathless.

"I knew it was you that saved dad," he said, "but I didn't tell him. I let him go over alone. Was he very shocked?"

It was hard for Lida to tell what had happened, because Quentin kept interrupting her with kisses.

"I knew he'd fall in love with you if he only gave himself the chance," he said. "Now will you marry me, honey?"

"That's why I came right over," she smiled. "So you wouldn't escape me."

Avowal

THE room was dark except the moonlight silv'ring through—
And I shall not forget the way it shone upon the face of you;
Nor yet the deep sweet silence that fell between us two,
Because love dwelt within our hearts, wordless, young and new!

—Peter A. Lea

BETTY-LOU'S LOVE QUEST

The Picture on the Cover

PART IV

Left Alone

ALONE!

Betty-Lou was alone.

She had never known what it meant before. Other girls had told her of being lonely, and she had not understood. Why, there are so many people in the world, so many places to go, so many things to do. How can any one be lonely?

But, somehow, now there was nothing. Nobody.

Nothing interesting, that is. Nobody that mattered.

Don was gone.

When one person has filled almost every hour of your waking time, and suddenly he isn't there any more—what is there left? Especially if you're away by yourself in a strange place and every one else is paired off, and you have only a nodding acquaintance here and there, anyway?

Love said, "Call him back, Betty-Lou."

And Pride said, "No!"

Love suggested, "Tell him you won't walk in the Bathing Beauty Parade, Betty-Lou. Tell him you never meant to walk in it. That you don't want to, anyway. That you wouldn't for anything. You were only teasing him when you said you were going to."

But Old Man Pride lifted his head again. "As if it's *my* place to give in! Never! He was horrid, he was bossy, he was stubborn. He thought he could tell *me* what I should do! He wasn't even nice about it! He didn't even say *please!* Find some one else, Betty-Lou. Some one who knows how to treat a girl. There are just as good fish in the sea! Plenty of 'em."

So Betty-Lou swam by herself, or rode in a chair on the boardwalk alone. And suddenly—it had never occurred to her before—she saw how unattractive men are, in the mass. There wasn't one she'd have had for a gift. All the unappropriated ones were paunchy, or scrawny, or bald, or had bags under their eyes. They looked so funny in bathing suits, too, with their Adam's apples exposed, and their legs—like the legs of some extinct bird.

Where were all the bronzed young giants, molded like statues, with whom the beach was swarming only yesterday? Sitting under umbrellas—with other girls. Or playing ball in the surf—with other girls. Not one unat-

tached, and how could she meet him if there had been?

"Plenty of fish in the sea, yes," she thought. "Fish is a good word for all the others—poor fish!"

In the afternoon she crept away by herself, away from the crowds on the shore. She went walking with a book under her arm, into the country back of the hotel. And concealed in the book was Don's picture.

After she had found a secluded spot she sat down and took the picture out and gazed at it.

Somehow, he didn't look "horrid" at all. He looked just—desirable. Was that mouth so "stubborn"? Or was it merely strong? Were those eyes the eyes of a man who would be "bossy"? Or were they merely the eyes of a man who would know what is right?

No, he wasn't any of those unlovely words. He was lovable—he was *sweet.*

What good is it to realize that, too late?

But is it too late, Betty-Lou? Listen to your own heart telling you. Listen to the whisper of Love. Shut your ears to the insinuating words of Pride.

Think again, Betty-Lou!

Is Pride worth—Happiness?

TO BE CONTINUED

NEXT: "THE RESCUE." On the Cover of the August 23rd Issue

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THE EDITORS,
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Planets of Destiny

By CAROL YOUNG

BY the application of the scientific principles of astrology your questions will be answered in these pages. But the publishers of this magazine, and also the conductor of this department, do not hold themselves responsible for the accuracy of the replies, inasmuch as many readers furnish incorrect birth data and others do not know the hour of their birth. This department is conducted only for such help or interest as readers may obtain from it.

One question is allowed each reader. Question must be accompanied by coupon to be found at the end of this department. Please do not ask questions concerning death, speculation or the whereabouts of lost property.

It is very important that you give the following data: time of birth (hour of the day or night), date, month, year and place. Also sex.

No personal questions will be answered by direct mail, but if you will send ten cents in stamps to cover cost of mailing, All-Story will be glad to return to you a short estimate of your character and of the future influences for those in your Zodiacal sign, giving suggestions for at least the next two years.

DAILY ASTROLOGICAL GUIDE

For the Next Two Weeks

August 9—It is always best to act calmly on a good day; to-day isn't such a good day, but it is still best to act calmly, if you must act.

August 10—Control your angers and fears in the morning and early afternoon; better for social and sentimental affairs in the evening.

August 11—Just one of those days when the usual drag is the thing to do; don't try to make too much progress—you might drop a stitch.

August 12—Money matters and new ideas look weak to-day; don't try to stretch your opportunities. Be content with an even break, if possible.

August 13—Finances still appear to be sagging for the majority; don't buy a steam yacht or a frying pan to-day unless you can pay cash for it.

August 14—A good day for matters connected with those above you; but better for men than for women, so go slow if you are of the fair sex.

August 15—Another good day. There is nevertheless a tendency to magnify things and think them better than they really are; avoid such errors.

August 16—A very good day for small matters and for anticipating the needs of the coming week; think things over carefully and make plans.

August 17—The tide of planetary aspects turns back to negative to-day; so go slow on important matters. Things apt to look better than they are.

August 18—Fairly good influences rule, but they are not reliable; relations with and for women appear better than with and for men.

August 19—Temper and poor judgment in the morning if you let yourself go; fairly good in afternoon, but adverse again in evening; slow up.

August 20—A plate of hash, best spot appearing to be in the late afternoon—everything else looks like left-over potatoes; don't get too gay.

August 21—Slightly better than the previous two days; correct thinking plus hard work will bring good results; otherwise just an average day.

August 22—A good day for putting into action the plans you made on good days for such things in the recent past; but don't start anything big.

MATRIMONY SERVICE

There are at least two ways of looking at it. If you are asking me about when you should marry with the added thought in your sweet little heads that life is a total blank unless right now is the best period of your life for taking such a step, you are not quite right, if not entirely all wrong about it. There is more to life than marriage; and as for the segment of life under discussion, there is more to marriage than even the wisest amateur suspects. It is something you can't see from outside.

But if you are asking me about when you should marry with the idea that it is something worth while knowing so you can be doing other things in the interval between now and then, all is well. You will note that the percentage is low of those who should be making up their minds at this time on this popular subject. I suspect that a number of my correspondents are laboring under the delusion that after they have made the effort necessary to rope and tie a mate it will be the last effort they will ever have to make. But such is not the case. Effort is just commencing for most people when they marry. Don't take my word for it; I'm only one person and for all you know I may be the saddest and most bitterly disappointed husband or wife in the world. Don't take what I say as the last word. Ask the person who thinks he or she owns one—a mate, I mean.

Here is the list for this time: in each case I have selected the next good date for deciding on matrimony for the person whose birthday and year is given. It is the next favorable opportunity, regardless of how impatient that individual may be. If you marry before then, you do so at your peril.

C. W., December 5, 1911, September, 1936.

M. S., November 16, 1911, January, 1935.

P. D., April 24, 1914, December, 1936.

B. R., October 22, 1913, October, 1934.

L. W., August 14, 1910, November, 1931, or June, 1932.

E. V. S., February 16, 1916, April, 1938.

J. P., January 24, 1908, September, 1933.

H. W., August 18, 1909, July, 1932.

L. D., July 10, 1912, January, 1935.

A. C., May 13, 1913, December, 1932, or July, 1933.

L. E. M. C., November 20, 1911, October, 1935.

M. C., July 1, 1882, November, 1934.

A. C., May 9, 1913, February, 1937; is this your correct data?

G. H., May 26, 1911, September or October, 1933.

K. L. R., September 17, 1913, October or November, 1944.

G. L. P., January 18, 1899, August, 1933.

R. S., November 24, 1911, July, 1931.

M. M. H., June 1, 1910, January, 1938.

S. G., December 27, 1907, September 1932.

A. S., June 19, 1913, May, 1942.

G. H. W., December 31, 1912, January, 1937.

V. Z. P., October 7, 1889, November, 1933

F. G. B., November 2, 1880, August, 1930.

Seems to me you can do anything you set your mind on, Mrs. C. P., born March 27, 1899, and beautifying things or people is one of your strong points.

Part of the trouble with most people who don't get their share of happiness, Mrs. W. F. L., born December 21, 1902, is that they are like the weasel Aesop told about. He felt so blue and low in his mind that he could think of only one thing worse and that was being blind; so he closed his eyes as he walked along to see how it would be if he couldn't see. While he was thus imposing upon himself, he passed a nice fat pocketbook that was lying on the sidewalk. A wide awake, enterprising squirrel who happened to be following saw it and picked it up, returned it to its owner and received his reward. That made the weasel all the more depressed. The moral is that we are never in situations that we can't make worse. You will have a number of good breaks in 1931. Do you suppose you will know them when you see them? I don't think your habits of thought have made you realize and take advantage of many you have had in the past, even though part of your troubles may have come through others. Get rid of those you bring upon yourself and I guarantee life will be a different proposition for you.

Can't say whether you will move to the country this year, or ever, L. H., born December 16, 1912—that is a matter that is entirely up to you.

But you should live as much of your life in free open spaces as you can. Hills and mountains are better for you than the seashore.

Improving generally for you, Mrs. G. B. H., born June 16, 1882. If you can continue to concentrate on what you are sure you want, all will be well. Your weakness is apt to be a tendency to get sidetracked.

Please don't ask me "What will be my exact financial position?" for any definite time or period, as does Mrs. M. E., born December 23, 1900. It is a type of question that cannot be answered by science. Do you really think such information could be foretold? Did you ever hear of any one who could do it? I never did. Think! Try to realize how much depends on what you do yourself. Suppose the planets indicated you would be in debt two years from now if you paid no attention to your affairs. You could fool them, couldn't you? All you would have to do would be to refuse to take foolish chances. Be on your guard. One sinks and another swims, yet both are in the same ocean. The difference between them is their skill as swimmers. Get that idea into your system and don't ever let go of it. Write me again about your husband, if you want information about his condition; and don't forget to send his birthday.

Probably not, Mrs. G. S., born January 26, 1890; at least, I don't see any good reason why you should.

What are you doing to make your health better, R. S., born April 14, 1896? Are you putting your condition into the hands of doctors and expecting them to do all the work? They can never cure you. All they can do is give you things to help; but no one has ever yet been healthy when he wanted to be sick. Haven't you had enough matter over mentality—you say you have been sick for five years. Why not try the other way around for at least the same length of time? Most people who have been ailing for years and decide to give mind over matter a whirl, try it for about ten minutes a day for a week and then give it up because they aren't completely well and happy all of a sudden. Start being cheerful, quit worrying—let things go to blazes if they want to, but don't let it throw you—and it may break your heart to find out the world can turn just as well without your sobs and self pity. It's often a terrible blow to one's idea of importance, but it does make a lot of us feel better if we can keep it up, especially if we are "nervous." All the doctors I have ever talked to tell me the patient's will to win is worth more than all the dope in the drug-store.

You're another who is blaming the doctors for your condition, aren't you, Mrs. A. P., born April 19, 1907? Read what I just said to R. S.

Better in the future than in the past, E. F. Y., born December 4, 1905, if you will follow some of the suggestions on the psychology of happiness I write here from time to time. Your worst enemies are doubts and fears. Learn to kill them at the source.

Gloom! Sadness! Irritation! Misery! Oh, dear, oh, dear! "When will I be happy?" asks Mrs. S. E. H., born August 15, 1907. If you aren't happy now, with life, hope, friends, some social position, out of jail, what do you want? You've just as much fresh air as the happiest person alive, but I'll bet you don't take as many deep breaths. Figure out what you want and then go after it—the work of trying to get it is more fun than its possession. If you're unhappy, it's because you are lazy; not necessarily physically lazy (although I think you are), but at least in the matter of using your faculties and talents.

Anticipation of trouble, Mrs. H. J., born October 9, 1907. If you are blue every spring, it can't be blamed on the planets, for they are never twice alike. Make up your mind that you will not be blue next spring; save it for next summer if you just simply can't get along without being blue at some season of the year. When you find out that it is a matter of your own inner control, as you very easily can, you will then take the next step and decide not to slip that way any more.

You can if you want to be, Mrs. T. M., born May 3, 1901. You want more money. Give more service in a more pleasant way; cultivate your abilities. You're worth what you're worth now because you haven't expressed any more of what your possibilities are. Perhaps one of your troubles is that you want the money more than you want to give value for value. Since when could that be done? Nature is always striving

for a balance; and Nature usually wins all arguments when a weak mortal is trying to live outside the Law. Don't look at money as though it were something all by itself; it is the measure of services rendered. That's why it's wrong to steal.

"Why is it impossible for me to make and keep real friends?" asks H. R. B., born August 11, 1903. You evidently have both the Moon and Jupiter in the eleventh house, that of friends. This, with Neptune in Cancer, ruling friends, indicates to me that you try to use them for what you can get out of them. A policy that will sink you before it will them, unless you stop it. Mental attitude again, and you must control it. Don't calculate the value of a friendship. Unless you can be as good a friend to the other as you would want her to be to you, it is your fault. Oh, yes, I know the planets are the cause of the way you feel and all that; but you don't have to take it lying down without resistance. Part of what we are here for is to fix up what's the matter with us—we must get above the planets.

OCCUPATIONAL

Not the best thing to do this year, G. L. C., born January 2, 1905; much better in 1931 if you can postpone it.

If you were born very close to midnight, L. H., February 20, 1910, writing is as good for you as art work; otherwise, the art is better.

A couple of good years, at least, E. E. V., October 25, 1889, lie ahead of you in business if you use your best judgment.

Something connected with original and constantly changing work, L. E. W., February 12, 1886; routine would floor you. You are better off in a small business of your own than when working for others.

Selling and distribution, "Gypsy," May 30, 1913.

Keen brain, but temper must be always under control if you would succeed in any line, S. D., June 6, 1917; travel and brain work.

Don't know what line you are talking about, H. M. P. L., July 5, 1896, but this is a risky year; work for older women in some way if you can.

Yes, acting is a good line for you, D. E. D., October 5, 1912, if you are willing to go the route—it is a hard one.

Politics, economics are your strengths, F. J. A., January 14, 1877, whether teaching or leading in other ways. Lie low for one more year.

Romance is better for you than journalistic work, M. J. McK., March 5, if you decide on a writing career; I think you would make good in fiction.

You said it, J. H., March, 1906. It is what you do off the job as well as on the job that puts a man across to the bigger pay. Study your mechanics.

Yes, you have artistic talent, E. K., August 15, 1913, but there will be trouble in trying to sell it commercially; dramatics are better for you.

THIS COUPON MUST ACCOMPANY EACH QUESTION ASKED

CAROL YOUNG
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

This coupon is not good after August 23. One question is allowed each reader.

Date of Birth..... ....., ... Time.....
MONTH DATE YEAR A.M. OR P.M.

Place..... Sex.....
MALE OR FEMALE

QUESTION:

.....

.....

Name.....

Street and No.....

City..... State.....

If you wish interpretation of your Zodiacal sign, inclose ten cents (see rules).

Handwriting and Happiness

By JOHN FRASER

JOHN FRASER, gifted handwriting expert, who has made a name for himself both in his native England and here in America, will analyze your handwriting. If you wish to know whether your sweetheart is the right man for you to marry, inclose samples of your own and your sweetheart's handwritings and address your letter to Mr. Fraser, care "Service for Sweethearts." If you wish his help in finding the profession for which you are best fitted, address him care "Your Career." For general reading, care "Character Analysis."

You may take advantage of one or any service, but a coupon must accompany each request for handwriting analysis. Coupon will be found at the end of this department.

Mr. Fraser bases his judgments on the scientific rules of graphology. In no case does he forecast the future or attempt to reveal the past. Scientific graphology undertakes only to reveal the inner secrets of your nature.

As many answers will be given on these pages as space permits. All other questions will be answered by mail. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany your request for analysis.

DISCONTENTED with her lot in life, Caroline L., of Camaguey, in far-away Cuba, wrote me some months ago about her early marriage and its unhappy consequences. According to her letter she was sure she had thrown her chances of happiness away on a worthless man. Her married life had so far been drab and dismal. She had come to the conclusion that matrimony was not the bed of roses it was cracked up to be—and a great many other wails!

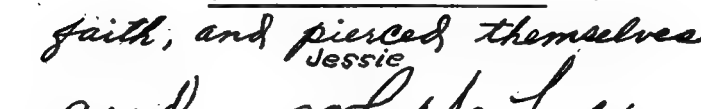
As soon as I finished reading her tale of woe, I immediately set to work to find out the cause of this misery. I had before me a sample of her husband's handwriting, and a few lines of her own. The result of my diagnosis was that Caroline herself was the chief source of trouble. The husband wasn't any more an angel than she was, but he at least had more manly principles than she had womanly virtues. I told her so and added a few words of counsel in the hope she would get a better slant on married life.

This morning I received a letter from my Cuban correspondent. It was a letter of thanks and gratitude for my timely advice. Caroline "see

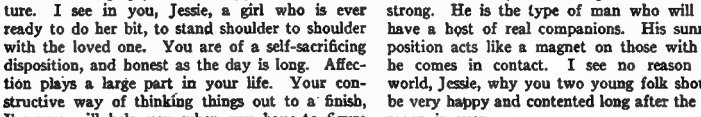
Google

life" from a different standpoint to-day, and as a result is happy in her little home. I mention this since it is the lot of millions of other married couples. A change of viewpoint is all that is necessary to make most of us contented in this world.

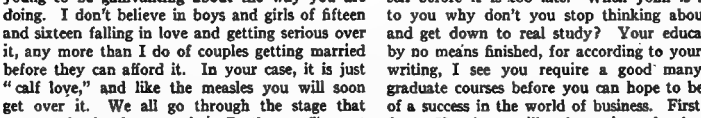
SERVICE FOR SWEETHEARTS



(Miss Jessie B., Kansas City, Kan.) In examining your two samples of handwriting, I discover a happy combination of characteristics in your two natures; a combination which should be the means of bringing you both happiness in the future. I see in you, Jessie, a girl who is ever ready to do her bit, to stand shoulder to shoulder with the loved one. You are of a self-sacrificing disposition, and honest as the day is long. Affection plays a large part in your life. Your constructive way of thinking things out to a finish, I'm sure will help you when you have to figure out the household budget. Oliver, on the other hand, is a manly sort of chap, and has an eye to big things. I would imagine he has a forceful personality, and carries himself well on every occasion. His faculty for making new friends is very strong. He is the type of man who will always have a host of real companions. His sunny disposition acts like a magnet on those with whom he comes in contact. I see no reason in the world, Jessie, why you two young folk should not be very happy and contented long after the honeymoon is over.



(Miss Bertha K., Moline, Ill.) I don't agree with you when you say that John is a rather heartless lover. The boy is somewhat unsophisticated and has not yet come to years of discretion. As a matter of fact, I think you are both too young to be gallivanting about the way you are doing. I don't believe in boys and girls of fifteen and sixteen falling in love and getting serious over it, any more than I do of couples getting married before they can afford it. In your case, it is just "calf love," and like the measles you will soon get over it. We all go through the stage that you are in, in the meantime, Bertha, so I'm not taking you seriously when you tell me that you lie in bed every night and worry over your sweetheart's cool ways of making love to you. Instead of answering your questions about love, courtship and marriage, I want to give you a word of advice in the hope that you will take a tumble to yourself before it is too late. When John is so cool to you why don't you stop thinking about him, and get down to real study? Your education is by no means finished, for according to your handwriting, I see you require a good many post-graduate courses before you can hope to be much of a success in the world of business. First things first. You have still a long time ahead of you, and in due season the right man will come along.



(Miss Estelle N., Fort Dodge, Iowa.) I enjoyed reading your letter and was interested in your remarks about that boy friend of yours. According to you he is a wonder, and a man who is to

make, not only a good husband, but a name for himself in the business world. Well, I indorse most of it, Estelle, but not all. In my eyes, Harold is just a good average as men go. He is inclined to gravitate more to the spiritual than to the material things of life. There is nothing coarse nor objectionable about him. He is all you say he is in this respect. At the same time, he is wishy-washy in his mental processes. I would call him vacillating, and temperamental. He requires a little more backbone. I'm afraid your Harold will never be a man's man, in the real sense of the word. He has practically no leadership qualities in his makeup. He will always be a good follower, but never a leader. It is true he is a conscientious sort of fellow, and one who would endeavor to do the right thing at all times. As a husband he would always be kind, considerate and loving. He is all right if you don't expect too much, and since your mind is made up to marry him I'm afraid my little word of advice is like water on a duck's back. So go to it, and my blessing be with you. And I hope it turns out well in spite of me!

been quite interested in
Janet
would be very much
Sam

(Miss Janet A. F., Pueblo, Col.) You impress me as a rather loving pair of young people. You are both forceful and optimistic, and seem to be both looking out on life with a great deal of anticipation. I see no reason why you shouldn't. With all your optimism however, I would point out to you there are several snags ahead which you would be all the better to avoid before you come to them. In the first place your boy friend is rather sensitive and thin-skinned. He is of the emotional type, and has the habit of carrying a "chip on his shoulder." In other words, he is touchy, and will have to be handled with kid gloves in order to get the best out of him. He is really a fine fellow, and all that you think he is. He is somewhat extravagant in his tastes, and likes to "keep up with the Jones." You are given to that yourself, so better be careful when you have a home of your own. Two spendthrifts in a family is not conducive to a large bank account. It is said that money has wings, but you'll find before you are much older that it is no homing pigeon. I would not hesitate in advising you to get married to Sam. The sooner the better.

YOUR CAREER

Will you kindly send

(Miss Kate L., Chicago, Ill.) I observe that you are a girl with a modest but firm disposition. You are not as studious or as observant as you might be. However, you have enough character to make your way in the world of business. In the matter of a vocation you should do well in the management of a department of some organization which employs female labor. You are sympathetic, and tactful, and know exactly how to handle human beings. I am sure you would be a great asset to such a corporation. You are a dreamer of dreams, and have the faculty of visualizing things before they come into being. Then another trait which is bound to assist you in this sort of work is your gift of the gab. You are evidently a good talker. You should not hesitate, Kate, to see some executive in one of your large stores in Chicago, and perhaps he will see from your personality and general bearing, an embryonic floor manager in you.

I would be a success

(Miss Frances J., Manchester, Conn.) A girl with your culture and analytical mind has a wonderful chance to succeed in the legal profession. From what you said in your letter you have evidently thought of going in for the study of law. This does not influence my opinion, however, as to your aptitude for this line of work. You *are* cut out for it, so my advice to you is, waste no more time considering, but go to it as soon as possible. Seldom have I seen a girl of nineteen with such a logical brain as you possess. You are logical to the finger-tips, and when it comes time for you to face a judge, I believe you will give the old man a good line! I would like to warn you about

that impatience of yours. You are apt to get off the handle rather quickly, and make yourself a nuisance around the house when you don't get your own way. Stop being childish, remember you are a big girl, and no longer in your swaddling clothes. You are also a little bit egotistical. You must have been spoiled when you were a youngster, and you have not yet got over it. These feminine foibles, however, should not deter you from being a leader in your chosen profession.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

your reading of my

(Miss Martha C., San Francisco, Cal.) You impress me as a girl with considerable vitality. Your mind is active every minute of the day. Nothing escapes you. But your temper is something to be reckoned with when you happen to be on your "high horse." On such occasions there is simply no living with you. On the other hand, you are a cultured person. I imagine you carry yourself well at any social function, and at such events are correct both in etiquette and in speech. You are evidently a generous-hearted soul, and one who is always ready to spend and be spent in the service of others. In looking for your negative traits, I have come across one or two which might very well be eliminated. For example, you love to talk about yourself and your accomplishments. A little of this goes a long way with the average person, and if you are wise you should soft pedal this propensity. You are also inclined to be opinionated. You don't listen very much to other people. You have a mind of your own, and all your thinking is home-cooked. Give the other fellow a break once in a while; you know, Martha, you can't always be right. Otherwise you are a pretty good sample of womanhood.

name and would

(Miss Mary McL., Augusta, Ga.) It is your nature to be suave and kindly. You ought to have many friendships to your credit. Everywhere you go, you are bound to leave a little bit of sunshine behind you. I could never imagine a girl with your tact making social errors. To come to your blemishes, I see you can work yourself into a great frenzy of excitement when you want to. When your pride or your self-complacency are wounded and disturbed, you become irritable and peppery. At such moments, your actions and words are unworthy of you. Your long loops below the lines show me how romantic you are. You are the type of girl who is never happy unless she is in love with some man. I believe you would be very poetic and sentimental. This is only natural in a temperament such as yours, and I only hope that you do have a sweetheart. Altogether, you are a fine healthy-minded sort of girl, and I wish you the best of luck.

THIS COUPON AND A STAMPED ADDRESSED ENVELOPE MUST ACCOMPANY REQUEST FOR ANALYSIS

JOHN FRASER,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway,
New York City.

This coupon is not good after August 23. A stamped addressed envelope must be inclosed when forwarding.

I enclose handwriting specimen for
—Service for Sweethearts.
—Your Career.
—Character Analysis.
(Check which you prefer. One coupon must accompany each choice.)

Name.....

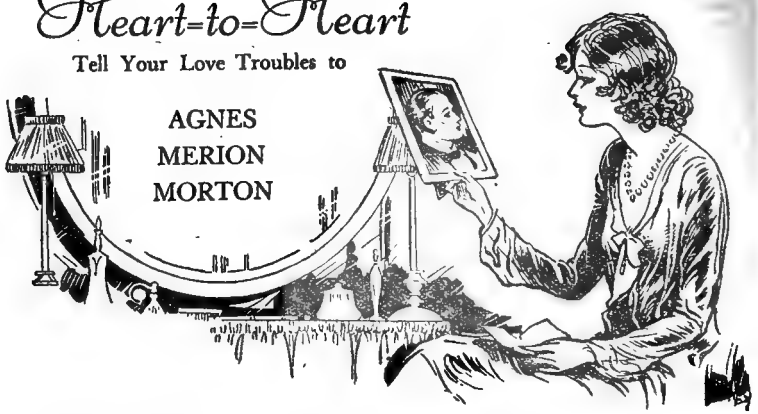
Street and No. .....

City..... State.....

Heart-to-Heart

Tell Your Love Troubles to

AGNES
MERION
MORTON



MRS. MORTON wants you to feel that she is a friend—some one to whom it is a comfort to tell your problems, who will advise and encourage you in your struggle for happiness, and who is always here to help. She is interested in you. Write to her freely, addressing your letter care All-Story Magazine, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

Every letter is confidential.

As Mrs. Morton receives so many letters, she cannot publish answers to all in the space allotted to her. Some, therefore, are answered by mail. Be sure to enclose a stamped, addressed envelope with your question.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

For some time now I have known of your column, and I greatly admire the whole-hearted and seemingly helpful advice you give. I have a problem on which I would like the opinion of a disinterested person, namely, yourself.

For the past three or four years we have, like countless others, been having financial difficulties, and to help out I took a job, although at the time I had two children. We were so situated that they were well taken care of during the day, but I confess that I missed the hours of companionship I used to have with them before I became a wage earner. I made enough to put us just around the corner from Easy Street, and in the meanwhile my husband made a very worthwhile connection, so the first of the year I gave up my job.

When things went bad for us we had sold our furniture, and our whole striving these past few years has been toward a home of our own with our own things in it, as we have just been rooming and boarding because we couldn't afford to do anything different. Now we have some money in the bank—a little—and we have also leased a house in the suburbs of this city. For months now I have been looking forward to keeping house again, and planning meals, and having our friends in for dinner, and also spending a great deal of time reading to my little girl, who is almost four years old. (Her brother died in the spring.) We have bought the necessary furniture to move into this house, arranged for water, gas, lights, etc. The furniture has pulled our finances down considerably, but we once made the mistake of tying ourselves down to notes to pay for things we soon tired of—things that wore out before we had them paid for. We had to sell, when we did, at a great loss.

Last night at dinner I had a telephone call from a friend of mine, saying that she was giving up her job for another one with shorter hours, because she was so dragged out and yet needed the money, too. So if I were willing she had arranged for me to take this position beginning with forty-five dollars a week. It is the only kind of work I know how to do—just my experience—isn't that luck for you? Just when I had decided to settle down to a round of daily domesticity, I had this offer.

Now this is what I want to ask you. Shall I keep on with the job (I went to work this morn-

ing, and like it fine) and help build up our finances? They are low, as I told you, because we bought so many things outright, and paid cash for them, and you know how a deflated bank account hinders you. Shall I try to hire a competent woman to look after the house and my youngster, and have dinner ready at night when we get home? Or do you think I ought to shelve the job and stick to my original intention of being through with office work? I can't decide. I left the matter up to my husband and he said I ought to do as I pleased. He has no objection to my hiring some one to take care of things for us, and he did think the money would come in mighty handy as we are always up against it before pay day comes round for him—just once a month.

I'm not handing you the line that I will follow your advice willy-nilly. I had thought of writing to Dorothy Dix, but I didn't want my family to see the letter in print and I'm not clever at concealing the real facts in the case in order to disguise them so that they wouldn't be recognized. I am the only one in the family that looks at your column, so I am safe in that respect. I have relatives in different parts of the country, and I hesitated at having my letter syndicated throughout the land, should Miss Dix, who I think is second to none, barring you, when it comes to giving people help on their problems, see fit to print a portion of my letter and answer it. I think that everybody who writes for advice has their mind made up in the first place, and they are hoping the one consulted will sympathize with their views on the subject.

I imagine you place yourself in the shoes, mentally, of the person who has written you for advice. All right. What would you do if you were up against the same situation? Would you stay home and keep house and do without things until your husband could build up enough balance to get the rest of the things you need, and be with your child and give her the care she needs and the love she is entitled to, and the training that only a mother can give, or would you take the job, even if only until fall or winter, and hire some one to take your place in the home? I would have my evenings, Saturdays (during the summer), Sundays and holidays. My husband would drive me to work in the morning, for it is right on his way, and would meet me at night, so the carfare element is out of it. There would be just my lunch money, and the girl's hire; my husband can carry our other expenses; his company pays his personal ones, even of his car.

Do you think I am a d— fool for even considering it, especially as I have been crowing lately to all my friends and family about the wonderful freedom I am enjoying at not having to be tied down to a time clock during the day? Or do you think I would be more foolish to turn down this apparently good offer of a job? To-day I was not even conscious of the time, I was so absorbed in my work. They say a new broom always sweeps clean, and I did get along famously. However, I am interested to know what you would do if you were I, and if you can give me an answer through your column I shall be no end grateful.

I have always wanted to write to your column, but have never before had a problem which needs plenty of thought, but this one has me just bewildered trying to decide for myself what is the best and the right thing for everybody concerned to do. I've tried to present both sides of the problem as it confronts me. I hope I have made myself clear and have not been ambiguous. This, then, is the crux of the whole situation. Shall I give up housekeeping and looking after my family, for a forty-five-a-week job at work in which I consider myself, if not infallible, at least proficient? I shall sign myself PERPLEXED.

Yours is the sort of problem, above all others, with which I hesitate to meddle, even if invited. But since you assure me that you won't follow my advice anyway, unless you want to, I will tell you one or two things you may not have considered. First of all, your husband's advice is about as good as any: "Do as you please." That is, do the thing which will make *you* happier, because then, and then only, will you be able to give happiness to your dear ones. If you give up this job before you have tried it out, and stay home with the idea of being self-sacrificing or noble, a dutiful mother and wife, you may not be able to sustain that lofty attitude for long. You might grow tired of the undertaking, become discontented and "blue," and then what sort of home could you make for anybody? I do not want to encroach upon Mr. Fraser's department, but I have a strong suspicion, from your handwriting, that you are not domestically inclined. And the tradition that a woman should stay home and keep house, just because she is married, or even because she has a child, is, after all, just a tradition. There is no more reason for all women to be housekeepers than there is for all men to be policemen, necessary to civilization as they both are.

On the other hand, if you do keep the job, you will have to pay for it in two ways. Not in your child's affection—I shall never believe that. Children love their fathers as much as they do their mothers—I have heard many mothers complain that they love them more. And the fathers are not home all day, so why should a woman lose her children just because she goes to business? But I have observed two results that are almost inevitable when a woman keeps on working after marriage. One is that her husband learns to expect it of her; the time never comes when her money does not seem "mighty handy." The other is that the woman herself finds that she *has* to keep on. She forgets the knack of being

content at home; she likes her own money, the contact with the world, the outside interests, too well, ever to surrender them willingly. I do not say that is a drawback. You may very likely get more satisfaction out of a well-done piece of office work than you would get out of producing a lemon meringue pie or a three-tiered layer cake. The woman is blessed, and perhaps happiest, who can find her fulfillment in her household duties and pleasures. But are you such a woman, Perplexed? Look at yourself in the glass to-night and ask the question.

In any case, it can do no harm for you to give the job a trial, see if you like it just as well after the novelty has worn off, and especially if home conditions are satisfactory when you are not there to superintend things. If taking the job is a mistake you will soon learn it, whereas if you gave it up without a trial you might regret it for a long, long while.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am a girl of seventeen, and have been reading your department in ALL-STORY for some time. I think it is very interesting and I've decided, since you have helped so many, maybe you could help me. I am the fourth child in the family; mother was married twice, and the three boys are not my daddy's, although he is just the same to them as if he were their father.

I'm in love with a boy four years older than I. I was a sophomore in high last year, but have been taking a correspondence course this summer so I can graduate next year. My boy friend wants me to marry him, but I don't feel like getting married yet, although I'd do almost anything to get away from my brothers—my half-brothers, that is. The oldest one is a dear but the other two! Neither has a kind word for me. The youngest makes fun of the boy I love, and I can't stand that because my boy friend has helped me more than any person I know. What I want to know is whether I should get married so young when I really don't feel like settling down, or not, or try to stay at home a little longer. If I stay home many more months I feel as though I will go crazy or do something terrible to my brother. He certainly gets my goat. Please, Mrs. Morton, what should I do? JUST WAITING.

I wonder why it is that girls so often imagine that marriage is a way out of their difficulties? It is so much, much more likely to be a way into new ones! If you have been reading this department very long, you must know that I'd advise any girl of seventeen to wait, even if she wanted to get married; certainly I cannot advise you to go ahead when you are not ready to, do not even want to. Especially since you have not yet learned the science of getting along with people, the science of self-control.

Do you think there are very many people on this earth who are ideal to live with? Don't you know that marriage almost always entails adjustment, and self-sacrifice, and giving up and giving in? You may never have a husband who is as trying in his ways as you find your half-brother to be, but he will be a superhuman indeed if he never shows one trait or one quality that falls short of perfection. And according to the lessons you have learned at home will you be able to meet those traits and bear with them.

Your brothers like to tease, particularly the youngest. There is little doubt that he will outgrow the tendency, and the quicker you stop letting him know how much he annoys you, the quicker he will stop doing it. There isn't any fun, you know, in teasing somebody who refuses to be baited. Try what ignoring him will do. Smile at his jokes, even if you think them in bad taste; start singing as if you did not hear him; talk to the others about a different subject, just as if you had not heard him. Why do you let him "get your goat," as you say? Why not pasture the animal where he can't find it?

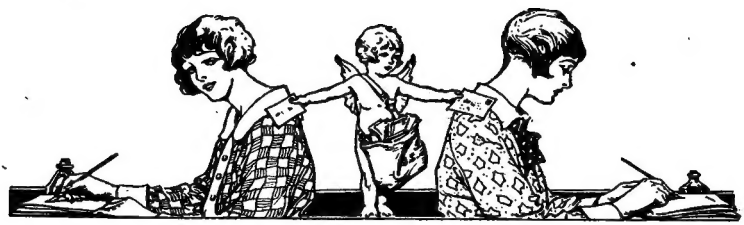
DEAR MRS. MORTON:

This is my first letter, and really is in answer to one I just read by a girl by the name of Leona, who spoke of her affair at the age of seventeen, with a young man—Leo. I shall try and describe myself in a general way just as she did. I am eighteen years old. I am five feet four and one-half inches tall, and weigh about one hundred seventeen pounds. I have auburn hair, and dark brown eyes. My hair is a long bob, and curly. I indeed approve of her suggestion that if there was a law passed saying that if a girl married before she was eighteen it would be illegal. Little does this girl realize what she has escaped.

At sixteen I was married to a very handsome young man two years my senior. We ran away, returned the same night, and kept the marriage a secret until seven months later. My folks wanted to have it annulled at the time, but we begged off, saying we were sure of what we had done. However, less than two months after our marriage was announced he left for college across the continent, and in the five months that we have been separated, I have had just two letters. No more, no less. My trial for annulment at this writing is just three weeks distant, and I can truthfully say that I shall be the happiest person in the world when the judge hands me a paper and says, "You are free." We were too young—far too young to think of marriage, and I have just realized it. I shall try and be as straight and fine as I possibly can, and surely some day there will be some one else I can love—maybe not as much as I did him—yet, some one.

I only want to say that Leona has saved herself a million heartaches, and I wish at the time I acted so foolishly I could have used her judgment.

CHICKIE.



The Lonesome Club

Conducted by DOROTHEA DALE

MAKE friends! Join the Lonesome Club and soon you will be getting more letters than any one you know.

Here's how to do it: if you wish your letter published in these pages write to Mrs. Dale, care of ALL-STORY, *280 Broadway, New York City, and describe yourself. Try to make it as interesting as possible—tell little things about yourself that will make others want to write to you.*

If you wish to communicate with the pals whose letters appear here, inclose your letter in a plain, stamped envelope and send it to Mrs. Dale. No letters will be forwarded without the extra stamp.

If you are a girl, you may write to other girls; if a man, to other men. Please do not ask for the address of any one.

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I do so want a friend. In fact, I am a cripple; that is why I am writing to you. Please help me find some friends, and the more I can get the better I shall like it. You don't know what it is to be a cripple. I get so lonely, sitting in the house day after day. No one wants to bother with me, so you can see why I write to you. Please help me. I like ALL-STORY very much.

MAY.

I am a girl sixteen, and quite lonesome. I don't know why, because I have a number of girl friends. I like all sports, especially dancing. I am four feet eleven, weigh 98, dark hair, fair complexion. Haven't much to say, but hope I will get some pen pals.

MARGARET OF CONNECTICUT.

The old gray matter has been working overtime trying to get an idea that would enable me to write a knockout letter eligible for printing in Lonesome Club, as I'm far more determined than any social climber—I'm trying to crash the gate. You should relent, Mrs. Dale, and put this mail in line for publication. I'm burning up with the idea of coaxing some of your wonderful friends to write to me. Think they would? Tell 'em I'm a sixteen-year-old, blue-eyed blonde, about five feet four, and a junior in high. I live in the Sunshine State. I'm an inveterate reader and love to tinker with machinery. Hope to become an aviatrix pretty soon. I'm never in a hurry to do anything, so I could say I'm never in time for anything. Come on, Mrs. Dale, help me get some pen pals from all over the world, wontcha? Oh, come on, you lonesome people, and help me paint the clouds with sunshine. Hoping to have my mail box crammed chock-full in the near future,

BLUE-EYED LUCY.

Just a young "sailor boy" wanting some good pen pals through your topping magazine. We are in the Caribbean at present and I would like to have a few (that means a lot) of friends to exchange letters with. I will write them some good letters, and as we get almost all over the world at some time or other they'll be interesting. I am five feet eleven, fairly well built, and, as

you may have already guessed, English. I have some good snapshots of various things and places, and would gladly welcome others—so roll up, and cheer up.

STAN.

Is there room for one more pen pal? I sure would like to join your Lonesome Club. I am a girl of fifteen, a blonde, five feet two, with brown eyes. I have special interest in all outdoor sports, am a stage dancer, and have many friends, but I would like to have a few pen pals in the bargain. I will promptly reply to all letters I receive, and exchange snapshots with all who want to. So come on, girls, and write to me. My nickname is

BOBBIE.

Station T-E-D-D-I-E broadcasting for pen pals, in her studio in New York State. She has keen blue eyes, a sunny disposition, and red-gold hair. Occupation—artist; age—eighteen. Would especially like to hear from musicians and artists; nationality or color has no limit. However, you must live outside of New York and be eighteen or over. No photos asked for—now!

ANXIOUS TEDDIE.

I am a girl of twenty-three summers, considered good looking. Won't you please try to find me some nice pen pals? Somebody who is interested in movie stars and dancing. Married or single. Come one, come all.

KAY OF MAINE.

I am a senior in high school, just another girl who wishes to have a number of pen pals. Seventeen years old, about five feet tall, weigh 108. I love all sports, am a member of the Rifle Club of our city, and am now president of our school dancing club. I am fond of writing letters and would be glad to exchange snapshots.

TOOTS, MICHIGAN.

I am a girl of twenty-one, five feet two, brown hair, blue eyes, wear heavy-rimmed glasses, one who likes to play ball, dance, skate, all kinds of sports. Thank you in advance for the help in finding the friends that I know you are going to give me. I like people who have had experience.

CATHERINE OF PENNSYLVANIA.

Just another girl pining for pen friends. High school graduate, seventeen years old, brown hair and gray eyes. I'm a lover of sports and last year I played forward on the basketball team. I also like to travel and camp. Next winter I am planning to go to college in the west.

ALYS.

May I have a small space in your interesting corner? I'd like oodles of pen pals, and I'm sure I can make my letters interesting. I am twenty, five feet two, gray eyes, dark hair, weigh 112. I work in an office and am an only child. I love all sports, skating, tennis, dancing and motoring, music and books. Come on, everybody—fill up my mail box.

FLORRIE OF CANADA.

Lonely, oh how lonely! We are chums and would like to have lots of pen pals. Snappy people of eighteen and over. Bubbles, eighteen, is five feet two, brown eyes and hair, and weighs 103. Dawn, seventeen, is five feet six, gray eyes and light brown hair, weighs 120. We are both considered pretty. We adore dancing and all sports, especially reading and hiking. We are constant readers of ALL-STORY. Snap out of it and write to

BUBBLES AND DAWN.

I am a boy of seventeen, blue eyes and dishwater blond hair. Am interested in all kinds of sports, especially swimming, skating, dancing, tennis, and something new in "sunny California"—miniature golf. Have you ever tried it? If not, write to me and I'll tell you all about it. I wish to hear from all, young and old. I promise to answer all.

HAPPY.

I am five feet three and weigh 115. Was seventeen last November, and have recently graduated H. S. I am now left with very little to do. My hobbies? I indulge in all sorts of athletic games, and am attracted to theaters and dancing. I would especially appreciate hearing from girls who wish to hear about Broadway and Coney Island and New York in general.

ROSE RUTH.

I wonder if some one will write to an engaged elevator girl of eighteen? I am five feet four, weigh about 105, have dark brown curly hair which I wear in a long bob, dark brown eyes, and an olive complexion. I am Scotch, Irish, English, and Italian. I can swim, dance, shoot, paddle a canoe, ride horseback, and am getting pretty good on my trapeze work. I sing and give impersonations over the radio once a week. Come on, girls, and let's exchange letters.

WESTERN TOMBOY.

I would like very much to have a letter printed in the magazine. I am eighteen, and have been married only six months, so am very lonesome. I have brown hair, blue eyes, five feet two, and weigh 126. I am fond of books, basketball and tennis. Would like to hear from both married and single.

HELEN OF MISSOURI.

I'm nineteen, fair in complexion, blue eyes, red wavy hair, five feet five, weigh 115. Am consid-

ered good looking. I'm not conceited—in fact, I don't like any one who is. Reading, shows, and car riding are my greatest hobbies. I like athletics very much, but as I clerk in an office I do not have time to participate in any. I'd be delighted to hear from any one who would care to write to me.

MARY ANN.

Won't you please let me join your Lonesome Club? I'd love to. As to letter writing, well, I just love to do that. Any age, from anywhere! Come on, every one, and chip in. I wanna be happy. As for myself, I'm twenty, have auburn hair, five feet six, and am considered good looking. I love dancing, swimming, and in fact any sport. I will answer every letter I receive and will also exchange snapshots. Come on, every one!

BETTY OF OHIO.

I am eighteen, five feet six, have curly red hair and dark green-gray eyes. I am fond of all sports, such as swimming, hiking, skating. A constant reader,

REDHEADED PEGGY.

Hurrah for the Lonesome Club! Won't you find a little space for me, too? I am seventeen, five feet four, dark brown eyes and hair. I like horseback riding, baseball, basketball, volley ball, and other good games. Will exchange snaps and other tokens with all.

MISS BOOTS OF PENNSYLVANIA.

I'm very lonesome and would like some one to write to the worst way. You see, I am a marine serving in the Army of Occupation in Haiti. I have been here sixteen months and have two more years to serve. I am a very respectable and refined person, twenty years old. I have only one girl friend, but lots of boy friends. I'd be glad to send photos of Haiti to any one who writes. I am five feet six, weigh 142, have dark brown hair, eyelashes and brows of same color, light blue eyes, and am considered by all my buddies as very good looking. Here's hoping you have success, Mrs. Dale, until the Haitian people go to war again, which is never.

EDDIE.

Hi, pals! Here I am—five feet three inches of pep. I'm seventeen, brown-haired, gray-eyed, living in a small town of Pennsylvania. What's more, I can cartwheel, do a headstand and handstand. I also play the piano and uke. Nice, no? But that isn't the half of it, no kiddin'! What else? Oh, that's up to you to find out, and that's easily done by writing to

A MODERN GIRL.

I am a junior high school girl of fifteen, with lots of pep; in fact, some people think I have too much. I wish you would help me get some cronies through your wonderful column. I have blue eyes and fair hair. I like all kinds of sports, especially tennis and dancing. I, like "Adventuress Jane," am fond of lots of boy and girl friends, and I have the fortune to know many.

BUDDIE OF TORONTO.

I am lonely and alone and have lots of spare time, so I could write and make friends through the magazine. Please try to get somebody to write to me, and I will answer every letter. I am twenty, and single.

BETTY OF NEW YORK.

I am twenty-three, five feet six, brown hair and brown eyes. I am a great lover of music and broadcast in my spare time. Would like to hear from a musical pal or lover of music. I will appreciate your photographs and will exchange mine in return. Letters will be immediately answered.

JOE.

I'm a lonely girl craving pen pals. I am five feet five, weigh 116, have blond hair (windblown bob), and blue eyes. Also pretty red lips, I am told. I go to high school and am sixteen. I love dancing and auto riding.

ELVIE OF JAMESTOWN.

I love writing letters. I am five feet five, weigh 127, and have long light hair and blue eyes. Am considered pretty good looking. I love swimming, reading and dancing.

LONESOME HAZEL.

I am a girl of sixteen, light brown hair and blue eyes, five feet four and weigh 130. I love to dance and to read. I go to business school.

LONESOME JOAN OF BROOKLYN.

I am a fellow twenty-two, with blond hair, blue eyes, and a good clear complexion. I'm keen for all sorts of athletics. I weigh 180, am six feet one, and a man through and through. So if you fellows want to give a lonely guy a break, write soon, and on my word of honor I'll write as soon as I get a letter.

JACK OF NEW JERSEY.

I'm a girl of seventeen, tall, with light hair and dark eyes and a fair complexion. For looks—well, write and I'll exchange snaps. I love to dance, play basketball, and I am learning to play the piano. My nickname is

BLONDY.

I don't write very interesting letters, but if I heard from a pen pal I'd try my best. I am five feet tall, with dark brown hair and light blue eyes. Every one considers me cute and good

natured. Oh, I forgot! I am thirteen, but I would like to hear from any one, no matter how old.

FLAPPY.

I love to write letters. Am twenty-four, but look even younger, medium hair, love to dance, swim and enjoy nature fully. Considering my numerous boy friends, you can imagine I am fairly good looking. I live in a very pretty and enjoyable country, and I am sure you would enjoy a visit here. I'll be waiting for letters, so don't disappoint me.

A TRUE PAL.

I am a young married girl of twenty-six, and have one child. I'd very much like to hear from other young mothers living in Ohio, especially near or even in Cleveland. I am a stranger here so get very lonely at times. My hobbies are reading, writing and going to the movies. Who'll be the first to write

TINY OF CLEVELAND?

I am seventeen, have short brown curly hair, gray eyes, five feet three, weigh 112. I am considered good looking, and am especially fond of dancing. Will exchange snaps, so hurry and write if you wish to know more about me.

GERTRUDE OF YOUNGSTOWN.

Just a home girl twenty-nine years old. I have medium brown hair, blue eyes, light complexion, five feet six, weigh 135. I like different kinds of amusements. I live on a farm, and will exchange letters and snapshots.

SMILES OF IOWA.

Reader's Choice Coupon

Help the editors select just the kind of story you like best by telling them which story in this issue appealed most to you.

This coupon and four others from previous or future issues will enable you to obtain free an original illustration in this issue. Just inclose five coupons in your letter and a drawing will be forwarded to you.

THE EDITORS,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

Here is my opinion of the stories in this issue:

Was She a Wife?.....

The Strangest Heritage .....

Dear Deceiver .....

The Second Kiss .....

The Cheat .....

Wings of Love .....

One Stolen Hour .....

Thwarted Love .....

My favorite authors are .....

Name .....

Address .....

(Name and address may be omitted, if desired)